APRIL 35 Cents

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

ger in the Night
ELEAZAR LIPSKY

ft in the Loot
STUART PALMER
nd CRAIG RICE

mb to the Slaughter
ROALD DAHL

ARGERY ALLINGHAM
NTHONY BOUCHER
RNOLD BENNETT

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

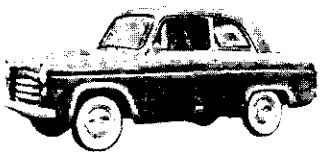
NEW IN TRAVEL

48 day GRAND TOUR
All Expense Independent
EUROPE

$998

per person—4 in group

PLUS FREE CAR



- All Hotel Accommodations
- All Meals (except lunch)
- Guided Sightseeing Trips
- Small Groups of 4 People
- Roundtrip Steamer
- Private New English Ford — Share Drive
- All Licenses, Permits, Insurance
- Directed Map Routings
- Independent Travel: England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland
- Roof Luggage Rack
- Membership Europe Auto Club

THIS NEW CAR YOURS FOR TOUR AND YOURS TO KEEP AT END OF TOUR

Visit, Phone or Write

FORD ABROAD TOURS 154 W. 56 St., N.Y.C. 19

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

***including* BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

CRIME STORIES

TIGER IN THE NIGHT	*Eleazar Lipsky*	3
LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER	*Roald Dahl*	81
A MATTER OF SCHOLARSHIP	*Anthony Boucher*	98

DETECTIVE STORIES

RIFT IN THE LOOT	*Stuart Palmer & Craig Rice*	18
ALIKE UNDER THE SKIN	*Hugh B. Cave*	52
MIDNIGHT AT THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL	*Arnold Bennett*	89
THE UNSEEN DOOR	*Margery Allingham*	123
THE MAN IN THE WHITE MASK	*Alan E. Nourse*	127

WESTERN CRIME STORY

AN INGENUE OF THE SIERRAS	*Bret Harte*	39

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

BY A SINGLE HAIR	*Nick Carter*	65

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

THE DIMINISHING CIRCLE	*William Holder*	100

EQMM "FIRST"

THE WALK-AWAY KID	*Sylvia Farnham Bachrach*	111

POETRY

NICK CARTER	*Newman Levy*	72

DETECTIVE DIRECTORY	*Robert P. Mills*	142

The best of the new and the best of the old

PUBLISHER: *Joseph W. Ferman* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 25, No. 4, Whole No. 137, April, 1955. Published monthly by Mercury Publication, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 471 Park Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1955, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A.

ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* GEORGE SALTER, *Art Director*
CHARLES ANGOFF, *Associate Editor* HOWARD K. PRUYN, *Production Manager*
GLORIA LEVITAS, *Assistant Editor* CONSTANCE DI RIENZO, *Editorial Secretary*

Cover by Dirone Photography

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMING UP IN eqmm:

a treasure trove of mystery and suspense

MAY ISSUE: An Hercule Poirot story by Agatha Christie; a Nero Wolfe novelette by Rex Stout; and an historical detective story set against a background of witchcraft hysteria in old New England, by Shirley Barker, the well-known Literary Guild author.

JUNE ISSUE: A G-man story by Nobel Prize author Pearl S. Buck; a new Dr. Coffee story by Lawrence G. Blochman; and "*Death at the Burlesque*," by Cornell Woolrich.

JULY ISSUE: A new suspense story by Charlotte Armstrong; and stories by Erle Stanley Gardner and Fredric Brown.

IN ISSUES OF THE NEAR FUTURE:

Distinguished detective and crime stories by

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART
WADE MILLER
THOMAS WALSH
MIGNON EBERHART
ROY VICKERS

Literary discoveries from the work of

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
ALEXANDER DUMAS
MARK TWAIN
HONORÉ DE BALZAC
DANIEL WEBSTER

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Q-Apr-5
471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.
Enter my subscription for one year (12 issues).
☐ I enclose $4. ☐ Please bill me.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE

Eleazar Lipsky is the author of THE KISS OF DEATH (*a successful motion picture*), THE PEOPLE AGAINST O'HARA (*another successful movie, starring Spencer Tracy*), *and* LINCOLN MCKEEVER (*a Literary Guild selection*). *All his work has an authentic legal background — which is not surprising because Mr. Lipsky served under Frank Hogan for four years in the District Attorney's office of New York County, and since that time has had his own law practice in New York City. More than 10,000 cases came under his attention — most of them, he says wryly, "on the seamy side" — and from this first-hand knowledge of people and their problems, and of the force and authority of the law, has come Mr. Lipsky's greatest strength as a writer. For he is capable of projecting in words an impressive and convincing realism, with details that have the ring of truth in them; he knows compassion and he achieves dimension; he has an artful grasp of character and dialogue. And all this you will find in his prize-winning story — all this and more; for implicit in the story are certain important questions: To what extent is society (with a small s) responsible for Eddie Dickinson's terrible predicament? And equally serious, if not more so, to what extent is a boy like Eddie salvageable?*

TIGER IN THE NIGHT

by ELEAZAR LIPSKY

"SOMEBODY PLEASE HELP ME!" THE hoarse animal sounds were over, and the boy stood swaying in the center of the room, both hands clasped to his face. His striped trousers were pegged into yellow shoes, a mocha jacket swept almost to his knees, a flowered tie was resplendent. A flow of blood trickled down his left wrist, staining his sleeve below the elbow, and this blood, oozing through trembling fingers, dropped to the carpet.

"*Please* help me," he begged. "Joe?"

A man answered, "Joe ain't here."

"I need help," the colored boy repeated dully. Something that had jellied and clotted with blood dropped from his hand, and a woman's voice of disgust broke the spell. The roomful of men and women stirred.

"We need an ambulance and the police," the woman stated imperiously. "Clarence! Go down the street and call the station! Give 'em your name, and you tell 'em, this is one time the stick-up man got stuck!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, Ma!" A weedy youth ducked his head and went clattering down the tenement stairs, flinging explanations to the neighbors, racing through the street to the police call-box. In the apartment, a sharp babble broke out, men and women grabbed hats and began to leave, while the wounded boy stared, moaning softly, unseeing, feeling only the warm blood welling in an empty eye socket, tasting the smell of gunsmoke and boiled meats until the tread of authority filled the room . . .

Some days followed — or was it weeks? It was on the whole not too bad — dark and light and pain deadened with morphine and the good indifferent treatment of the city hospital's prison ward. His leg lay in a plaster cast, and this was a surprise because he had been unaware that a bullet had struck near the knee. After a time he was told that his right eye would be saved. The bullet had gone splashing through his left eye, and his nose had been fractured, but in time the great purpled bruises subsided and he was allowed visitors.

He was a good patient and the nurses like his cheerful manner.

On a sunny day in September the orderlies put up partitions and set a chair beside his bed. The boy took this jokingly, and with some wonder, and then a well-dressed colored man with a brief case entered and sat facing him. He spoke pleasantly enough.

"Eddie Dickinson?"

The boy nodded. "That's me, sir."

"I'm your lawyer." With a trace of friendly self-importance, he added, "Mister Phillips."

"Sir?"

"I've been appointed by the Court. Is that all right with you?"

The boy frowned. "I don't get it, sir. What for do I need a lawyer? I didn't do nothing. I beg your pardon, sir. I don't want to offend you."

Phillips was a tall man with grave eyes and tapering, sensitive fingers. His manner was precise, almost fussy. He considered the information, and tapped out a cork-tipped cigarette.

"In that case how did you get that eye shot out? And that bullet in your leg? Those things don't generally happen."

"Oh, that?" The boy pressed his thick lips together with a resigned air. "Don't nobody believe me? I told the police, and then I told Mr. Wiley, the district attorney, I don't know how many times."

"Suppose you tell it one more time for me."

"Why would you believe me?"

Phillips smoked comfortably. "I want to know your side. After all, they've got you for murder — felony murder. If they make it stick, you'll get the chair, boy."

Eddie Dickinson smiled incredulously.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Oh, *yes*, sir!" said Phillips pleasantly. "Hard to believe, isn't it?"

"Sure beats me!" the boy muttered. "All I know, there was a party, this place they call Mrs. Hillegas. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

understand she's been running these parties a long time — chitlings and greens, beer and cole slaw, hot dogs, and dancing. I came there with sixty-five dollars sitting in my pocket, and I was stupid enough to tell somebody I met up there."

"Who was that?"

"A girl."

"Do you know that girl's name?"

"No, sir."

They stared at each other before Phillips resumed smoking.

"Go on," he said. "Why did you tell her about the money?"

The boy grinned widely. "I admit that was my mistake. Guess I wanted to show I was a hot shot. I work in the meat market on Twelfth Avenue and I make good pay. You can ask my boss, Mr. Rowe, the Sky High Packing Company, where I'm learning to be a butcher. I had this money saved up, and I can prove that. Ask the savings bank."

"Then what?"

"About 2 o'clock I was messing with this girl in the hallway when one of them, man they called Choatey —"

Phillips made an encouraging sound. "The one that got killed?"

"That's right, Choatey. He was getting drunk and mean. He stuck a gun in my belly and told me he was going to blow it off if I messed around with this girl. So I tried to argue. Then a little guy named Slope —"

"Lou Slope?"

"Sam or Lou, which I never knew, this Slope yells I got a roll of bills and to take it off of me. So I told Choatey he could have my money, only not to hurt me, and I gave him the money and we sat around talking, but I did *not* like the look in his eye one bit. Then I danced some more with this girl —"

"What was her name?"

The boy lowered his eyes. "Emmalou, I guess. Something like that," he said reluctantly. "But she was a nice girl."

"What does she do?"

"Works in a beauty parlor. I think she does manicures. Anyhow, I got to thinking how it was my money and by what right did Choatey take it from me? I kept watching how he was getting drunk on this beer, and I figured I might snake back my wallet —"

"Did you have a gun?"

"Me?" The boy's voice went falsetto. "I never had no gun in my life! Maybe a knife now and then, only for protection. But gun? Don't know nothing about no gun! No, *sir!* This Choatey had a gun, but not me! What makes you talk like that?"

The lawyer's smile was disconcerting as he polished his glasses with a folded piece of silicon paper. "Come down to the shooting."

"Nothing to tell," said the boy. "I made a grab for the wallet, then he reached for the gun, and we wrastled, and it went off. Or maybe this Slope had the gun. There was a lot of confusion, and to tell you the truth I don't know exactly which way it went, except — blam! A ton of bricks hit me. I was standing there begging for help

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I heard this Mrs. Hillegas yell, 'Choatey's dead!' Then she called me some dirty names."

"What names did she call you?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir. It reflected on my mother. I like to respeck people, and I like them to respeck me and mine."

"Very sound," said the lawyer.

"Then somebody yelled, 'Let's frame this guy, or we all in trouble with the law.'"

"Who said that?"

The boy gingerly touched the dry white pad over his left eye. "I don't know. By that time I had lost this eye, and it sure hurt. I just wasn't asking no names. I couldn't believe it. That's something you can't never believe, that maybe you can lose something like an eye. But it do happen to people, and that's how it happened to me, and that's God's truth. I walked into a joint, and they set to rob me, and now they fix the blame on me. It ain't right, sir. They making me out a criminal, the while I'm a working man. Ask anybody, ask my boss."

They sat staring a long moment. Behind the partitions arose the clatter of trays and the joking of nurses with sick prisoners. Phillips squinted as a shaft of sunlight from the barred window struck his eyes.

"Eddie —?"

"Sir?"

"Do you want to help yourself?"

The boy nodded earnestly. "I got a lot to live for, Mr. Phillips. Tell me what to do."

"That's a good story you've got there, Eddie —" The lawyer paused to dispose of cigarette ash behind the radiator, and went on lightly. "One of the best I ever heard."

"Yes, sir?" A grin of pleasure, somewhat puzzled, appeared and hung, expectant of praise, then faded as the lawyer went on, "There's just one fault."

"Sir?"

"You forgot one thing."

"Such as what?"

"Witnesses, Eddie!" Phillips raised a reproachful finger. "Witnesses! More than a dozen people saw the whole thing."

The boy exclaimed scornfully: "You mean the other side — Choatey's *friends?*"

"Exactly."

The boy blinked his sound eye, bloodshot and ringed with purple bruises, and considered the point. "Well," he said nicely, "what can you expeck? They *Choatey's* friends. A man's friends *got* to stick by."

"But Choatey's dead."

"That makes no difference."

"They've got an entirely different version."

"I am *not* surprised," said the boy severely.

The lawyer had been wearing a tweed topcoat and a pearl fedora, and these suddenly seemed heavy. He folded the coat across the bed and flicked an oily black ash from the creamy perfection of his hat. His voice lowered to a troubled level.

"The district attorney believes that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you came in at about 1 o'clock with two men, older men, who looked like longshoremen. One was heavy-set and the other had pockmarks. They answered to 'Fats' and 'Rocky' —"

The boy flapped his hand over. "I don't *know* any Fats or Rocky," he cried wearily.

Phillips seemed not to hear. "You had some beers and there was horseplay and foolery with the girls until 2 o'clock when Fats turned off the music and called a stick-up. You all pulled guns —"

"Including me?" the boy asked with irony.

"Everybody lined up in the parlor with some grumbling," continued the lawyer calmly. "It went quietly until Fats began to search the women. When he got his hand into this woman's blouse, Choatey said, 'If you're going to rob us, then rob us. Go about your business, but try to act like gentlemen and show respect for the ladies.' Do you remember that part?"

"Any reason I should?"

"Because then Fats turned to you and said, 'Kill this man for me, Eddie."

The boy rolled his eyes incredulously.

"Then what did I do?"

"You made the high sign and you said, 'Like drinking a cup of coffee, Fats!' You were calm and easy and nobody believed you'd do it, but you crossed the room and you shot Choatey. Slope grabbed for your gun, shots were fired, a fight broke out. You had an eye shot out and got a bullet in your leg. Fats and Rocky held off the crowd with guns, then ran off and left you. Choatey was dead with a bullet in his throat and you were caught. All that adds up to murder, Eddie, and the indictment came down this morning. The Court will appoint me to defend you, and I'm here to do what I can."

"You alone, sir?"

"I've got two law partners, but I'm running the case."

Beyond the partition the sounds had changed. Luncheon had ended, orderlies were removing trays, there was an old man's laughter and a commercial on afternoon television. The boy's face screwed in a puzzled frown, his lower lip hooked in blunt yellow incisors.

"Sir, I don't know what to say," he murmured disquietedly. "How do it look to you?"

"I'll tell you this much." Phillips let his hands smooth the fabric at his knees. "Unless you can answer those witnesses, you'll be put to death."

After a pause, the boy asked slowly: "You mean the chair?"

"Yes."

"How can you be sure?"

"I talked with Mr. Wiley, the district attorney —"

The district attorney! A picture leaped into the boy's mind — a lean, yellow-haired man with cold blue eyes, quietly insistent, agile and quick with a knowledge of one's innermost thoughts, a tongue of irony — and the picture faded. Eddie's lips compressed nervously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Beats me," he muttered. "I thought losing this eye was about the worst, and now you tell me they fixing me for the chair?"

The lawyer nodded slowly.

The boy's large head, capped with a scalp of black crinkles, fell back. The eye rolled, yellow and bloodshot, picking out details of the lawyer's dignified dress down to the pocket handkerchief.

"Sir, how can I help myself?"

"I'm sure —" Phillips coughed delicately, clasped his hands, leaned against an inner reluctance. "Fats and Rocky have disappeared, and there's no line on them, only descriptions that might fit a thousand men. Mr. Wiley might trade two for one."

"What do *that* mean?

"If you turn them in, you can save your life."

A wondering smile rose. "Squeal?"

"Yes."

"And *they* set in the chair?"

"They might — not you."

"Suppose you were in my shoes?"

"My advice," said the lawyer stolidly, "is to think of yourself, because in a case like this it's your only sure way out."

The boy's smile trembled. "But I told Mr. Wiley, and I told you — I don't *know* any Fats or Rocky! These people are making me out a fall guy, and that's the simple truth."

"They've got more than a dozen witnesses against you."

"But if I'm not guilty," the boy cried, "how can I point out two men, answer me that?"

Phillips smoked two cigarettes, shook his head as the nurse looked in then resumed uneasily.

"Trouble is, Eddie, you've got no possible defense — no alibi, no insanity, no mistaken identity, none of those things — nothing except your own version, not one witness for your side, not unless some friend shows up to swear you had no gun, and even then it's a long shot."

"I appreciate all that."

"Have you got a friend?"

"No, sir."

"Boy, boy," murmured Phillips, shaking his head dubiously, "where'd you ever come from?"

"Stokes Corner."

"What's that?"

"Little country town near Charlotte, just a crossroads."

"Are your folks alive?"

"No, sir."

"Not one?"

"No, sir, not a soul."

"What's your education?"

"Just a bit of reading, and I can write and do sums. My father worked in the fields but he taught me what he knew."

"How about schooling?"

"They couldn't keep me in school. I was too wild, and it weren't worthwhile."

"What made you leave Stokes Corner?"

"I just had nothing to keep me."

"Boy!" said the lawyer sharply.

"Sir?"

"You sure you grasp everything I told you?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I got a head on my shoulders, sir. I've been teaching myself things, and I'm fixing to be a butcher, and that's no mean thing."

"Have you got a girl?"

The entire face, broad and big-boned, smiled shly. "I have not."

"But as I recall, you've got a lot to live for."

"Guess I have."

"What girl did you have in mind?"

"Well —" The boy hesitated. "I guess I was thinking of this Emmalou. She was mighty pleasant —" He trailed off, abashed. "She might be a witness for me," he added hopefully. "I've had her on my mind a lot while lying here."

The lawyer shook his head. "Forget that! She was Choatey's girl, and she'll put the gun right in your hand."

"I can't believe that!"

"She'll be their star witness."

"Oh, my!" After a silent moment the yellow eye welled up with tears, and fat drops trickled into the pillow. The column of throat, helpless and thrown back, worked convulsively.

"Excuse me crying this way," the boy whispered wretchedly. "It's just I'm so worried. Everybody at me, the police and Mr. Wiley, asking me things I can't tell them, and nobody in the world to help me, maybe not even you."

Phillips strode to the barred window and gazed down. In the courtyard a group of convalescents were sunning themselves. "Cry it out," he said patiently, and after a time the boy blew his nose, and said, "Funny thing, sir, the one eyes is gone, but under the bandage it still gets wet when the good one cries."

The lawyer turned angrily. "Tell me about Fats and Rocky!"

"Don't even you believe me?"

"I don't know what to believe."

"I am *not* guilty," said the boy with dignity. "I don't *know* those two men."

"Do you want to think it over?"

"Thinking it over don't change the truth."

"I've heard *that* before."

"Are you mad at me, sir?"

"No." With disquiet, Phillips put on his coat and stood twirling his fedora. "If that's your story, that's how I'll try the case. There's only one point. If these other jailbirds here try to coach you, don't expect to cop a plea. This is felony murder, and the D.A.'s office has a policy — no plea! You go to trial, win or lose. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

The lawyer scowled. "I don't know why I get into this kind of thing, I swear I don't! Goodbye!" With an angered nod, he slipped on gray gloves and left the ward. A burst of senile laughter followed him out.

Phillips was a man of affairs in Harlem, a patron of an uptown art theatre, counsel to a neighborhood Chamber of Commerce, contributor to the local press, deacon of his church, an ardent husband and the good-humored father of three spirited girls — the eldest was the garlanded

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poetess of the Fielding School. His good dress reflected a sense of success. He felt that the sun was shining on him, and in time, if the cards fell right, he could even expect judicial honors. His office was a model of efficiency, and all this had been achieved by his early forties. His face was smooth and calm.

But as the months passed, he found himself overwhelmed by his assigned case. He neglected his civil work, the backbone of his practice, in frantic preparation for the trial, and the large manila envelope lettered *DICKINSON, EDW. ADV. THE PEOPLE ETC.*, bulged wider each hard day. He scoured the area for ammunition against the Hillegas clientèle, engaged friendly police in off-the-record talks, evolved intricate summations before his bathroom mirror, and exasperated wife and daughters with his remoteness of mind. On the eve of the trial his teeth were rattling with tension and fatigue. His associates, Zack Pitkowski and Joe Kerrigan, hardened veterans, were stupefied.

They made the point at a luncheon conference at Guido's, a small restaurant on Mulberry Street patronized by lovers of fine Neapolitan cookery. "We're supposed to defend the boy, not start a crusade. When we do our best, the rest is up to the jury. Stop worrying. You didn't kill the man — the boy did."

Phillips clasped his shaking hands between his knees. "I'm convinced the boy is innocent, but how do we prove it?"

"Sure he's innocent," nodded Pitkowski, tossing the phrase worn smooth with usage, "and I've got a heart condition. Don't expect me to fall dead for the best client in the world."

"I can't believe he's kidding us," said Phillips in his now hesitant voice. "I don't think he's that smart."

Pitkowski sipped from a brandy glass. "I musn't get excited, I mustn't be disturbed," he intoned like an article of faith. "It won't be this case that carries me off to my reward."

"He's a likable boy." Phillips let his thoughts roll back to his most recent prison interview. He saw himself, an older man with eroded emotions, facing with exasperating futility the boy's calm smile. He was inclined almost to agree with Kerrigan's restatement of the ancient rule of thumb.

"You can't help a man who won't help himself."

Emmalou Howard had quit her job at Madame Bertha's, a fancy establishment, so it took the lawyer time and ingenuity to locate her in a barber shop on upper Lenox Avenue. Phillips ordered a manicure and studied her covertly as a hot towel partially covered his face. His eyes swam in the moist heat.

The girl, he decided, was enchanting. She was slender and light-skinned and lovely, with turbulent dark hair floating at her shoulders. Her eyes had an elfin glint and her voice was tart with the accent of Virginia. Her cool touch made his palm tingle. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

refused to visit his office and in her lunch hour he took her to a Chinese restaurant. She sipped cup after cup of tea in wary silence.

"I thought he was nice, yes," she admitted. "He had clean nails. I always look to that in a man. When they tell you those big lies, Mr. Phillips, you look at his nails, that's the little thing that counts."

"Did you let him kiss you?"

She nodded seriously. "Well, he couldn't dance, didn't seem to know how, and Mrs. Hillegas keeps the lights low, so I didn't see any harm in it. He was very respectful, I mean, he didn't feel me up right away like most men would, and I appreciated that. He didn't seem to know the fundamentals, not the simplest things, just kept saying 'Hunh?' to everything with his jaw hanging, a real country jake. All he could talk were his plans to be a butcher. Asked me how would I got about carving twelve steer to serve thirteen companies of soldiers? I had to laugh a little, but he was sweet."

"Did Choatey see this kissing?"

Her fingernail drew a line in the tablecloth. "Choatey was high and mighty. I don't know what he saw."

"If he saw you kissing, would he get jealous?"

"Now why," she asked warily, "would he get jealous?"

"Weren't you his girl?"

"I am nobody's girl."

"The boy likes you," said the lawyer hopefully.

"I know that."

"He thinks you can help him."

Her eyes gravely searched his face. She was half his age, yet in her pity she seemed older. "Mr. Phillips, I'll talk to you like I would to my father," she said softly. "I'd like to help that boy, I really would, but I'm under strict orders not to discuss the case, especially with you. If Mr. Wiley knew I had this lunch, he'd snatch me bald. Don't ask me more, because anything I might say can't do you any good."

Yet his guile was great and in an hour he drew out much of value, and the events of the fateful night grew clear in his mind. They parted on friendly terms. "Think it over," he said urgently.

She squeezed his hand and darted back to the barber shop, leaving a lovely and lonely moment behind in the street.

The prosecutor was adamant.

"He has his way out," said Wiley flatly. He was seated on his desk, arms folded, smoking, somewhat wearied of the argument. "If he'll give me Fats and Rocky, he can save his life. I'll let him plead to murder in the second, and I think that's generous. This case is solid."

He was indeed, as he said, generous. A plea to second-degree murder would allow eventual parole and release from prison, and the offer from Wiley, a cool technician, was a tribute to Phillip's dogged persistence. Wiley went on crisply.

"All I ask is a show of good faith. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admit the boy is young, and seemingly not too bright. I admit he might have been involved by older men."

"Then why not give some weight to his version?" the lawyer urged in a nagging tone. "I know that neighborhood, and I tell you that's a bad element around Mrs. Hillegas. Maybe she runs a respectable party, maybe not, but I say it's a joint with God knows what going on in the back rooms."

Wiley raised his brows. "I've got no information on that."

"I tell you I know what I'm saying and I don't care what story the police bring you! The boy resisted a robbery, and that's the fact."

"The truth remains," said Wiley impatiently, "that more than a dozen witnesses were questioned separately, and their versions match down to the smallest details. I took some of those statements myself."

The lawyer paced about to quell his agitation. "Even so," he urged with despair, "he's just a country boy who got himself involved. Why not give him that plea on compassionate grounds?"

Wiley slowly lit a fresh cigar and stated a fact: "With a gun in his hand he was as safe as a tiger in the night."

"Oh now—!" the lawyer protested.

"City boy or country boy," said Wiley grimly, "we've got to have a policy. He killed a man. He knows what he's up against."

The lawyer's teeth clicked audibly as he stared at the lean-faced prosecutor who sat puffing smoke rings. "Tell me one thing, Wiley," he asked vindictively. "If the jury acquits, will you feel relieved?"

"Why, of course," Wiley responded with surprise. "Why shouldn't I?"

The lawyer left the office and at the elevator burts into tears of fatigue, exasperation, and rage.

Ultimately the boy was removed to the city prison and lodged in a tier with a motley crew of stool pigeons, hardened offenders, and material witnesses. With his sweet smile, he made friends and heeded their warnings against informers, in turn to be warned against those giving the warnings, only to find this too was a stool pigeon's trick. He enjoyed the warmth of the rabbit warren, bantered with new friends, joked with correction officers, ate heartily, and absorbed the sights and sounds of a new way of life. His leg wound ached and his raw eye socket prevented sleep, but nights passed with the soft playing of an ocarina. He never discussed his case, and advice from the jailhouse lawyers went unheeded. He knew that his lawyer would do his best.

The trial proved to be unexpectedly interesting to Eddie Dickinson.

For the first time in his brief life he was the focus of attention in an important matter. Not one but three lawyers were looking after him; the most terrifying man in the world, Judge Matthew Brady, was treating him with polite concern; even that mean man, Mr. Wiley, the chief pros-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ecutor, was fussing the worst way to reconstruct exactly what he, Edward Dickinson, had said and done that fatal night to a total stranger named Rupert Choatey. It was altogether a satisfying business. Eddie sat at polite attention, conscious of his clean collar, crimson tie, pressed blue suit — all supplied by his chief counsel — while his three lawyers took turns pleading for an open mind, and invoked the presumption of innocence, demanded justice, and outlined Eddie's version of the facts to twelve stony-faced jurors. There was repeated reference to someone called the defen*DANT*.

"Is that me?" he whispered behind a cupped hand. "Am I a defen*DANT*?"

Phillips nodded. "That's right."

"Defen*DANT*, defen*DANT*!" The boy tested the sound. "Am I against all the *PEOPLE* of the *STATE* of *NEW* York?"

"That's just a way of talking."

"Oh, my!" The boy pressed his lips self-consciously as the judge's stern glance floated past; then Eddie sat at attention once more. The technical witnesses brought a puzzled frown to his face, and he sought to impress the jurors, and thus to help his lawyers, by letting the roll of his eye proclaim innocence, incredulity, and outrage. After a time came Mrs. Hillegas, a big-boned woman with gray hair, brimming with scorn and disgust, and she was followed by a mixed bag of dubious types — night-club workers and petty gamblers. Eddie muttered protest, whispered excitedly, cast derisive glances at the ceiling.

"They lying, Mr. Phillips," he muttered. "It wasn't that way at all, not one little bit."

He brightened when Emmalou Howard was sworn in. She came in a checkered blouse, a girl with delicate hands, her voice a whisper as she took the oath. With a nervous smile she glanced over and the boy's heart bounded with hope.

Her testimony stunned him.

For the rest of the trial he gazed at his hands, sullen and morose, and when he took the stand his manner was dogged and resentful, as though he expected disbelief. The lawyers led him mumbling through his simple story, and under Wiley's cross-examination he replied with a pugnacious thrust of his lower lip.

"Naturally they sticking up for Choatey," he spat with irritation, as though to a dull-witted child. "They are his *friends*. It's what they *got* to do! Still and all, they made up this Fats and Rocky, they robbed me for sure, and they all lying!"

He received the verdict with calm, and his boyish smile was a blow to the lawyer's heart.

There was no recommendation for mercy.

In due course — swifter, it seems, than it takes to tell — judgment was affirmed in the higher court of appeal, and a date was fixed for execution.

On the day before execution, the lawyer arrived at the death house

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Sing Sing Prison. Heavy blue clouds were driving across the river and a damp chill was everywhere, but the building was heated and comfortable. A mood of unease hovered in the outer rooms. When Eddie came shambling out to the final interview, throat bobbing at an open shirt, his heavy features were placid. He was stroking a newborn kitten.

"Got any news, Mr. Phillips?"

The lawyer put aside his fedora with a shaking hand. "How are you, Eddie?"

"They feed me all right, and they doctor me," the boy admitted, working his tongue around his teeth. "Only this last week my appetite is bad, since I've got this looseness. It seems to mean I'm getting nervous. I just hope I don't spoil things for the Warden. I'm supposed to eat a hearty last meal." He chuckled with hollow mischief. "Well, not exactly eat it, that's not necessary, but at least order it. That's supposed to show we all friends, that there's nothing personal, so I'm ordering fried chicken, string potatoes, and vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup. Then the Warden will know I had nothing against him. It's all been explained to me."

Phillips said, "That's a good idea."

The kitten clawed feebly at the boy's hands. "You going to be here tomorrow, Mr. Phillips? I'm asking, because otherwise there is nobody."

"I don't think I'll be able to come," Phillips said.

The boy nodded. "Well, that's all right. You've been better to me than my own father, and don't think I feel reproachful. All this has been an experience." The throat bobbed twice with humor. "You might say, it has taught me a lesson."

"Son —" said the lawyer dolefully.

"Sir?"

"What good was my best? Nothing can save you but those two men, Fats and Rocky. Mr. Wiley swears you must know them."

"When did he say that?"

"Just yesterday. You can still get out of it if you'll give them up."

The boy placed the kitten against his cheek.

"Mr. Phillips, I remember how you told the judge how I had *got* to be innocent, because if I was guilty, why didn't I betray my friends? You said it was unthinkable I could do otherwise. Isn't that what you said?"

"Yes."

"So if I don't give them up, I must be innocent," the boy argued earnestly. "Is that true, or isn't that *not* true?"

"Yes."

"Then what can I say?"

The lawyer rose with a sigh, braced himself against the trembling of his knees, smiled feebly, and shook hands with Eddie. The boy added, "I couldn't fake two men, Mr. Phillips. I thought of that, and I decided it wouldn't be right."

"Good luck," said the lawyer. "If you change your mind, just tell the Warden and he'll hold things up, even

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the last minute. You ought to appreciate that Mr. Wiley wouldn't do that for just anyone. He'd still like to help you."

"Isn't that sweet?" said the boy sarcastically.

"Goodbye," responded the lawyer through tight lips.

The boy reassured him: "Now don't you worry, not about one thing, because I'm all right. I'd just like you to let that girl Emmalou know that I'm not mad at her one bit."

"I'll tell her that."

Shaking his head, the lawyer left the death house, skipping heavily in his haste to put prison behind him. Like a blind man he took the train at Ossining and saw nothing until he got off at 125th Street in Manhattan. He found his way to a bar where he drank himself into forgetfulness.

Phillips was standing in his storage room, about to consign the tattered manila envelope to a dead-files cabinet when the telephone rang. It was from Wiley with an invitation to luncheon.

"Drinks are on me," said Wiley.

The lawyer demurred. "I'm busy catching up," he said shakily, "and I'm not drinking." But of course he gave in at the hint of an interesting development. He found drinks waiting at Guido's, and so too was the chaplain of the prison, a young man with an inviting pleasant smile.

Wiley said, "You know Father Dunn?"

"Of course." Phillips studied the menu and settled for a fruit cup and black coffee. He said little while Father Dunn animatedly discussed the progress of various prisoners in whom Wiley was interested. He had regards and good wishes from many, and a few curses which he kept to himself.

Abruptly Wiley said, "Father, tell our friend about Eddie Dickinson:"

Phillips gazed up sharply. "Did you know him?"

"Not too well," said the priest. "Except for a pleasant word now and then, I had no official connection with him, and neither did any other chaplain. I saw to it that he had cigarettes and chocolate bars, and that pleased him. The day before he was executed he called for me."

"Did he strike you as a killer?" asked Phillips bitterly, "the kind to whom murder is like drinking a cup of coffee?"

An odd glance flickered between the priest and the district attorney.

Father Dunn said, "His last thought, Mr. Phillips, was for you. He asked me to convey his gratitude. I think he grew to love you. He had no one else in the world, except that he seemed to daydream about this girl in the case —"

He paused, and Wiley supplied the name: "Emmalou Howard."

"That's a boy's heart, I suppose," the priest went on. "It's got to attach itself to something to love, and I gathered that the girl was, or is, a charmer. He was well behaved in the execution chamber. He shook hands

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the guards and assured the Warden of his high regard." Father Dunn squeezed his eyes briefly. "Just before he left his cell, he gave me a letter for you."

Skillets were banging somewhere and a voluable argument in dialect broke out at the rotisserie.

"Let's see." Phillips smoothed out the blue-lined prison paper on the tablecloth. The writing was illiterate, the boy had leaned heavily on a stubby pencil, but the message was clear enough. The lawyer studied it through, then read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Phillips. This is my last day and I am writing to you because I am sorry for the way I treated you, only I did not mean to fool you, not at the end. Fats and Rocky were names we made up when we bought the guns, that is why nobody was able to find them through those names. That was Fats idea like most of the ideas were his. If Fats tells you to do something you will do it. I would not have shot Choatey except Fats said so. Please tell Miss Howard that I am sorry about Choatey, only he would be all right if he kept his mouth shut, so he has his self to blame because he asked for it.

"I wanted to tell you about this but you would have made me tell Mister Wiley how to catch the real Fats and Rocky and I could not do a thing like that. Now it is all right, I guess. I want you to know that you did not really lose the case because I killed Choatey all right.

"I know I could of saved my life but I do not think it is right to squeal on your friends. I guess that is all. Your friend. Edward Dickinson."

The lawyer finished and was silent. He had no feeling except — what? The emotion to govern the situation was not there. He had fought a cause, and it was no cause. Only —

The bitterness was strong.

"It's not possible!" he muttered. "He was just a boy —"

"That's just it," said Wiley crisply. "He was too simple entirely. It got him into murder, and when we gave him his chance he didn't take the way out. I don't see what else we could have done."

Phillips turned to the priest.

"Oh, don't ask me," said Father Dunn grimly. "I can't account for it. He could kill a man for nothing, because someone told him to — but he couldn't save his own life." He put aside his coffee irritably. "I hate the whole dirty business of putting a man to death. I don't care *what* he's done — it's the butcher's way."

Phillips abruptly stood up and put on his coat and hat. A curious hard smile hovered on his face.

"Oh, no, you don't understand at all," he said in a low voice. "Mr. Wiley explained it so clearly in court. The boy was guilty. He killed a man, and the law says he deserved to die, because when he went out with a gun he was like a tiger in the night. Isn't that what you told the jury Mr. Wiley?"

"That was the courtroom," the prosecutor retorted. "I had a case to try."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phillips seemed not to hear. "I can't defend what that boy did, but there was something human in him, something worth saving. If we had gotten to him first — ahead of those others, ahead of the Fats' and the Rockys of this world — who knows, Eddie might be alive today."

Phillips threw some coins on the table and left, his shoulders square, his head high.

It was a clear day with a wintery sun melting the recent snow. He walked the distance far uptown to his office.

He completed his task with the tattered manila envelope, binding it firmly with a faded red ribbon, making sure the boy's letter lay inside, on top of the other papers.

Then he closed the file cabinet and went home.

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Death of a Cheat" (formerly "The Long Window"), by John Eshleman. ". . . action fine . . . ," says the *Saturday Review.*

A BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "Lovely in Death" (formerly, "The Snakes of St. Cyr"), by William O'Farrell. Abridged edition. ". . . exciting yarn . . . ," reports *Anthony Boucher* in the New York *Times.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "Fall-Guy for a Killer" (formerly "The Yellow Overcoat"), by Frank Gruber. ". . . wonderful flavor . . . ," comments the New York *Herald Tribune.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Rex Stout is fond of telling how once upon a time an editor got the Bright Idea of having Erle Stanley Gardner and Rex Stout collaborate on a story which would involve both Perry Mason and Nero Wolfe. Rex Stout indicated his willingness, but he stipulated a single condition: that somewhere in the course of the plot Della Street must spend a weekend in Atlantic City with Archie Goodwin! The project fell through, although truth compels the admission that it was not prudishness on the part of Della (or Erle) that prevented the coalition.

Needless to remind you, no such provision, stipulation, or condition pertains to the manhunting and womanhunting activities of Stuart Palmer's Hildegarde Withers and Craig Rice's John J. Malone. The escapades of their dual detection are always strictly platonic — but they sure are a tonic to all concerned!

RIFT IN THE LOOT

by STUART PALMER and CRAIG RICE

"I AM IN NO MOOD TO FACE IT NOW, whatever it is," said John J. Malone firmly as he came into his office shortly after 11 that morning. "Maggie, have we any aspirin in the place, and if not will you be a good girl and run down to the drug store?"

"No, *twice*," said his long-suffering secretary. "You can sweat out your hangover the hard way. I've got to stay here by the phone, it's been buzzing all morning. First, Joe the Angel called and said that just after you left his bar last night a man came in asking for you. Joe said he could always smell a *wronggo* a block away and maybe you ought to watch yourself."

Malone watched himself in the little wall mirror, wincing slightly. He adjusted his lush Countess Mara tie, already well-dusted with cigar ashes. "So what? In the legal profession one meets all kinds of people."

"Joe the Angel seemed to think that this was one you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley. And boss, it *may* be coincidence, but it says here in the *Tribune* that Eddie Vance busted his way out of Joliet yesterday."

The little lawyer's face brightened. "Eddie the Actor is loose? This may be good news — maybe he'll get to where he stashed that bank loot and finally pay me my fee!"

"Maybe he'll cut your throat, too,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maggie said darkly from behind her typewriter.

"But *why?* I saved him from the chair, didn't I? Never lost a client yet."

"Yes, you saved him. But he still got a hundred years at hard labor, remember? And before he went to the penitentiary he is reported to have squawked very loud that you double-crossed him and must have made some deal with the D.A.'s office."

Malone grinned. Harbin Hamilton, deputy district attorney for Cook County, had for years been trying to nail Malone's hide to the barn door, and the little lawyer wouldn't give him the correct time. But Malone's grin was feeble. "Yes," he admitted thoughtfully, "Vance may have got stir-happy. I suppose I could leave town until they pick him up."

"I have just seven dollars between me and a life of shame, which they say is nice work if you can get it. You couldn't get to Evanston on seven bucks." Maggie looked at her desk pad. "Also Miss Hildegarde Withers is in town, stopping off en route to New York on a holiday, and she wants to have lunch with you."

"Not that — not *today!*" Malone had three times been involved in murder cases with the irrepressible schoolma'am, always with considerable risk to life and limb and with no appreciable fee; but he still had an inexplicable fondness for her. "Okay, call her back and tell her I'll meet her at Henrici's at 1."

"Since *I* have to put up the money," said Maggie sensibly, "we'll make it Thompson's cafeteria." She reluctantly produced five dollars out of the remainder of her week-before-last's pay check. "And watch yourself, Malone. Eddie the Actor is a very nasty character, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if he's the man with the oily voice who's been calling all morning and trying to find out when you'll be in and refusing to give his name. *Why* we ever took that case —"

"I was appointed by the Court as a public defender," Malone reminded her. "Eddie was supposedly broke, though we all knew that he had some $50,000 of the bank's money hidden somewhere — only he never could get to it and wouldn't or couldn't tell me or anybody just where it was. If he'd talked and turned back the loot, I could maybe have got him off with only fifty years."

"Which still is a long time to hang by your thumbs or sit on a red-hot stove, anyway you look at it," Maggie said with a certain tone of veiled sarcasm.

"Not so long when you consider that a bank guard got killed during the caper. We were lucky."

"*We?*" Maggie echoed.

But she relented and went out for the aspirin.

"Exactly why," demanded Miss Hildegarde Withers over their luncheon coffee at Thompson's, "are you looking over your shoulder so often, Malone? Guilty conscience?"

"Maggie believes that I am a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

marked man," the little lawyer admitted hollowly.

"Another murder case?" cried the schoolteacher, brightening. She wore a hat which could have been put on top of a Dutch chimney for storks to nest in, but her gray-blue eyes were keener than ever. "I could stop over a day or so and help solve it."

He blinked. "This one was solved three years ago — no mystery about it at all."

"Then why are you as jittery as a Mexican jumping bean?"

"Well — I'll fill you in on the story. Eddie Vance, known in underworld circles as Eddie the Actor because he has a wardrobe of uniforms and always manages to look like somebody else when he pulls a bank job, knocked over the Irving Trust, dressed as a window cleaner, with the help of three masked confederates. During the fracas one of them, a cheap hood named Jack Shaw, lost his head and killed a guard. The other two accomplices were shot down by police outside the bank, but Eddie Vance and Shaw escaped in different directions. Eddie himself has never been known to carry a gun, but of course technically he was accessory in a murder. He got away with the loot, some $50,000 in small bills; he was free for just one day but during that time he managed to hide it somewhere. Shaw is still being sought by the police, but since he had no previous criminal record and they have no photographs or fingerprints to work on, it's a tough job. I was appointed to defend Eddie the Actor, and got him off with a hundred years, a minor victory."

"A hundred years is a rather long time," said Miss Withers.

"You took the words right out of Maggie's mouth. But there's still the matter of that cache of dough. Eddie promised me ten grand of it if I saved him from the chair — which I did, with a neat bit of legal sleight of hand, even if I say it myself — but I never saw a red cent of it. Now he's suddenly busted loose and Maggie thinks that maybe he has a grudge because I wasn't able to get him off with a lighter sentence. Maybe she's right, too. Eddie the Actor is a guy who could fight a rattlesnake and give it the first two bites."

"Dear me!" gasped the schoolteacher. "The company you criminal lawyers keep! Malone, it's obvious that you must get out of town for the next few weeks, until the police succeed in re-arresting this unlovely character. You can come along with me to New York; my convertible is having something done to its remission or whatever they call it, but they promised at the garage that it would be ready tomorrow."

Remembering her driving, Malone almost thought that he would rather face Eddie the Actor, but with his usual gallantry he refrained from saying so. "Maybe —"

"Maybe me no maybes. You're coming. I just got a nice bonus on that movie cartoon case I told you about, and I can afford to finance you if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

necessary, as I presume from past experience that it is. The first thing is to get you packed and out of your hotel before this Eddie character tracks you down. Come on, time is of the essence."

The little lawyer obediently followed her out of the restaurant and they took a taxicab to his hotel. "Maybe you should wait in the lobby?" Malone suggested.

She bridled. "Certainly! Do you think I'm in the habit of going to men's hotel rooms? Besides, the place is probably a shambles."

It was — not to the surprise of John J. Malone when he entered the room, since he had left it so. The only surprise was that a bellboy sat in the one easy chair, reading early editions of the *Herald-American.* On second look he was a rather mature bellboy with a very short haircut and the face of an intelligent weasel. The little lawyer did a double-take. "Eddie Vance!" he cried. He took a deep breath. "Now Eddie-boy, there's no need to get tough about this."

Vance smiled. "You got me entirely wrong, shyster." His hand hovered near his lapel, and it was fairly obvious that if Eddie the Actor had once had an allergy to firearms he had conquered it while in prison. "Siddown, shyster, and listen. I busted out of the pen, see? I came out in a can on the garbage truck —"

"Type casting," murmured Malone under his breath.

"— and I'm going to stay out, understand? I'm going away, to South America or Cuba maybe, but first I've got to get to that dough of mine. You help me get it and I'll see you're taken care of." He made an unpleasant gesture. "If you *don't* —"

Malone sat down very, very carefully on the unmade bed and tried to relight a cigar that was already glowing. "Er — an interesting idea, Eddie. Somewhat startling, and a little out of my line. Where is the stuff?"

"It's safe, in spite of that punk Shaw, the hophead who blew up and blasted the bank guard. He's been trying through the grapevine to get me to spill where I stashed the loot so he can dig it up and get his cut — or more likely, if I know him, to take it all and scram. I figure he's got nothing coming." Malone could see that point of view, and nodded. "Anyway," continued Eddie the Actor, "the place where I hid the stuff I can't go near it, see? On account of right now I'm hotter than a three-dollar pistol and there's always a chance that the law has a stake-out there. So you're going to pick it up for me."

"Have you ever considered that my face is as well-known to the police as yours, if for somewhat different reasons?"

Obviously Eddie hadn't. He thought. "Then you've got to get somebody else to go, somebody you can trust, if you want your fee — and you want to stay alive." The man, Malone thought, was obviously as tense as an E-string. "How about your secretary?" Vance suggested hopefully.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malone shook his head. "Maggie is strictly on the up and up — she'd have none of it."

"Well then, somebody else — or *else!*" The man was desperate.

At that auspicious moment there came a sharp knock at the door. Malone started to rise, but a pistol popped into Eddie's hand, waving him back. The knock came again, and then a voice from the hallway. "Malone? I know you're there, so open up!"

"It's only — only a client I'm expecting," the little lawyer improvised hastily. "And I've just got the idea that she might be the answer to our problem." He rose and went to the door, to admit Miss Hildegarde Withers.

"Malone, I waited —" she began — and stopped, seeing the ersatz bellboy.

But Malone shook his head at her warningly. "Cut it, Tillie. You don't have to go into your act here. Toledo Tillie, this is Eddie the Actor, a former client of mine, and he wants something done that I think you can do better than anybody — for a reasonable cut, of course. Nothing rough, it just involves picking up some merchandise, and picking up maybe a grand for yourself."

Miss Withers sniffed, sighed resignedly, and sat down on a hard chair. "So what's the caper?" she inquired, in her best approximation of a voice likely to be Toledo Tillie's.

Eddie Vance was staring at her, almost incredulously. Malone said hastily, "I'm defending Tillie when her case comes up next month, charged with conning department stores. She's out on bail now."

"Hiya, Tillie," said Eddie, extending a hand. "You certainly got the front — you look *too* respectable, almost." He turned to Malone. "Can we trust her?"

"I'd trust her as I would my sainted mother," swore the little lawyer shamelessly; his sainted mother had abandoned him on the steps of an orphanage when he was a few days old. "As you can see for yourself, Eddie, she could walk right past any police stake-out without the cops giving her a second look. She could go right into your girl friend's house, maybe peddling books or something — "

"Wait a minute!" cried Eddie the Actor. "How'd you know . . . ?"

"I didn't, until you just told me," Malone admitted. "Though it seemed only natural that you'd have stashed the loot at Ethel Megrim's house somewhere, just as it seems natural the cops would be looking for you to show up there now. Even if they searched the place at the time of your arrest and found nothing. They know how close it was with you and Ethel. Miss — I mean Tillie here can walk into the place and get Ethel to hand over the money. Well, what do you say?"

Eddie Vance scowled, looking at the schoolteacher rather as if she were a used car that he contemplated purchasing. "*Maybe*," he conceded. "Say something with uptown class in it."

"I *beg* your pardon!" Miss Withers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sniffed again. "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty; that is all ye know . . . and all ye need to know.' Keats."

"She's got the lingo," admitted Eddie the Actor grudgingly. "I'm not one to trust dames much. I didn't even trust Ethel when the thing happened; I sent her out for a jug that night and stashed the loot while she was gone. She has no idea of where it is, so she can't just hand it over to this old dame or anybody, see? And —" he continued as Miss Withers seethed inside, "— I don't want Ethel to know about it now, or she'd insist on tagging along with me to Cuba or somewhere and help spend the dough. I'll pick me a señorita down there."

"Very sensible," observed Malone coolly, avoiding Miss Withers's glare.

Eddie the Actor threw away his cigarette and nervously lighted another. "Only how do I know Tillie here doesn't just grab the loot and lam?"

"She wouldn't think of that —" began Malone.

But the schoolteacher interrupted. "Nobody can say that Toledo Tillie is a doublecrosser — there are ethics in my profession, Mr. Vance. I only steal from marks. Anyway, I don't need your dough, only I could use a small cut because of this con rap I'm in at the moment."

Vance nodded. "Okay. But remember, even if I'm hot I got connections, and if you did try to get out of town with my money you wouldn't get farther than Gary, Indiana, before you'd feel a shiv in your back. Understand?" He said it almost pleasantly. "Well, then — here's the dope." And he told them where the bank loot was hidden — under the rosebush in Ethel Megrim's backyard.

"How clever!" Miss Withers said admiringly. "It should be a cinch."

"Not unless we get Ethel out of the house while you do the job," Vance insisted. "She's sharp, and she'd catch on if you showed a sudden interest in the garden or anything. There's only one way to work the pickup." And he told them the address and the phone number and the plan — and a rather ingenious plan it was, too. "Take it from there," said Eddie the Actor. "I'll meet you — no, I'll phone Malone here sometime tonight or tomorrow. And no tricks. Understand?"

He went quickly out the door.

"It's much too tricky for me," said Miss Withers to Malone after she had got her breath. "I played along because you obviously wanted me to, but this isn't honest. We should call the police at once. Malone, I'm disappointed in you."

"We haven't much choice," pointed out the little lawyer wryly. "Go ahead, and don't ask too many questions." He picked up a bottle. "I don't suppose you'd care to join me in a highball?"

"There wouldn't be room enough," snapped the schoolteacher, and huffily departed. She had always known that the little lawyer cut corners now and then, but this — even under duress — was violating all sorts of laws about receiving stolen property and harbor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing a fugitive from justice and heaven knew what else. Well, she had given her word — or Toledo Tillie's word — and was morally or immorally bound to go through with it.

So she sought out a big bookstore on Michigan Boulevard and provided herself with the first volume of an expensive set of encyclopedias; thus armed she set forth for Rogers Park. Argyle Street was mostly lined with apartment houses and stores, but here and there were sandwiched brick bungalows of which Ethel Megrim's was one.

The block in question seemed to be deserted except for a woman with a baby carriage filled with groceries and baby, an empty taxicab, and two small boys who were manfully trying to wreck each other's tricycles. Yet she took no chances, working her way along the street from door to door, peddling her wares. Few people were home at this hour; most of the apartment houses had *No peddlers or agents* signs, or locked entry doors, but somewhat to her surprise she got orders for two sets of the encyclopedia before she finally came to the apartment building across the street from Ethel Megrim's home. It had been too good to last. There was a burly, pink-faced man in the lobby, leaning against the wall and reading a newspaper somewhat too elaborately; from where he stood he had an excellent view of Ethel's doorway. "Oh, my prophetic soul!" murmured Miss Withers. "The Law is already here." But, as she knew from experience, a frontal approach is often the best. So she came boldly up to him. "Excuse me, but do you have the time?"

He looked at her. "Three thirty," he said, unsmiling.

"Oh, dear, only that? And two more hours I've got to spend canvassing for this old encyclopedia before I can take my shoes off and relax." She sighed, and then smiled hopefully. "It's an excellent set — if you don't have one at home would you like to look at the sample volume?" She extended it. "Real buckram."

"No, lady," the man said, with considerable finality. The schoolteacher paid a token call at two apartments in the building, and then went across the street feeling that the man was watching her over his newspaper. Prudently she first tried the house next door to Ethel Megrim's — and walked into an open-armed reception from a wrinkled old lady with incredible, henna-flaming hair, who was obviously dying for someone to talk to. The schoolteacher's pitch for the encyclopedia was almost drowned out by a spate of words; she had to accept a cup of tea and listen to the bright sayings of Mrs. Gardner's grandchildren, admire their snapshots, lend an ear to all the neighborhood gossip, and be regaled by a play-by-play account of a morning soap opera.

Finally in desperation Miss Withers rose to go. "And I'll think about the encyclopedia," Mrs. Gardner conceded. "You drop back tomorrow, and we'll have another chat and another nice cup of tea."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The schoolteacher nodded vaguely. "I must get back to work now, though. How about your neighbor, do you think she might be interested?"

"That Ethel Megrim? I shouldn't think she reads much — she's too busy hanging on that TV set of hers when she isn't carrying on with her boy friend. He's a taxi-driver and if you ask me —"

Finally Miss Withers tore herself away and rang the bell next door. Luckily Ethel Megrim was at home. She turned out to be a rather pretty-ish woman in her late thirties, carrying a bit of extra weight and somewhat long in the tooth. She was wearing a house-coat that had seen better days; the television set was blaring and she had evidently been enjoying a can or more of beer. She did not feel any desperate desire for a set of encyclopedias, which was no surprise to the schoolteacher; while polite, Ethel was evidently anxious to get back to her beer and her TV program. But as Miss Withers took her departure she managed to distract the younger woman's attention just long enough to press the button which disengaged the Yale-type lock of the front door. Hurdle one was over, anyway. She took the El back downtown and found John J. Malone in his hotel room, alone except for half a bottle of Canadian rye.

"I'm giving you a case of Antabuse for Christmas," she said tartly. But she condescended to report on the recent exploits of Toledo Tillie. Malone sobered up instantly.

"Then all we've got to do now," he announced, "is to figure out a way to lure Ethel out of the house."

"That shouldn't be difficult. Have your precious Eddie Vance call her up and ask her to meet him under the statue in Lincoln Park or somewhere.

"Fine. Only we don't have the faintest idea of where to reach him."

"Too true." Miss Withers tapped her somewhat prominent front teeth with a fingernail. "Wait — I have an inspiration! Ethel Megrim is *mad* for television. Suppose you phone her and pretend to be representing some TV program and if she'll be in the lobby of the Tribune Building at 8 tonight she'll be paged and taken up to the broadcasting studios to appear on a new secret giveaway program with a chance at a truck load of prizes if she can pick the right tune or something?"

Malone stared at her, then raised his glass. "To a brilliant suggestion!"

"And to a brilliant hangover tomorrow morning, if you keep trying to climb into that nasty bottle." But she smiled proudly. "Well, Malone, get on the phone."

It was no sooner said than done, or almost. Ethel Megrim was incredulous at first, but when Malone in his most histrionic manner assured her that her name had been chosen by lot out of the phone book she swallowed the thing hook, line, and sinker. Malone turned to Miss Withers. "We have time for dinner," he said. "Except that the only place I have credit is Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He ruefully surveyed the remains of Maggie's five-dollar bill.

"I insist on treating," the schoolteacher announced. "We'll go to the Empire Room at the Palmer House and fortify ourselves with succulent viands for the nefarious enterprise on which we are embarking."

"You have twisted my arm," Malone told her. "I always like to do my housebreaking on a full stomach."

A couple of hours later they came down Argyle Street in the misty rain, huddled under Miss Withers's umbrella and with Malone's Borsalino pulled well down over his eyes. But there was no sign of the man in the doorway. "Natch," said the little lawyer. "Ethel went out on our fake setup, and the cop tailed her hoping she'd lead him to Eddie the Actor." They went across the street to the narrow brick bungalow. The front door opened easily and they were inside the dark living room, which smelled of cheap perfume, beer, and dust.

"No lights," Malone warned Hildegarde quickly. He cupped his hand over the bulb of his flashlight and they walked through the deserted house which made up in depth for what it lacked in width; it had been built like a New York railroad flat. There was a bedroom and a bath, a dining room, and a long narrow old-fashioned kitchen which Miss Withers thought smelled faintly of mice. They went through a service porch and at last came out into the backyard."

"Holy St. Vitus!" gasped John J. Malone. There were at least *twenty* rosebushes in the narrow place, completely enclosed by a six-foot fence topped with barbed wire. And the only tools available seemed to be a rusty hoe and a trowel. "Where to begin?"

" 'Begin at the beginning; go on until you come to the end and then stop,' " quoted Miss Withers. And so they set to work in the feeble glow of Chicago's moonlight, filtered through the scattering rain clouds, their labors only slightly lightened by the blare of radios from the open windows of the apartment house next door. One was playing a Crime Doesn't Pay program, which the schoolteacher thought especially appropriate under the circumstances. Gloves and fingers were torn on the savage thorns; stubborn roots clung tightly to the sticky clay. They dug and they dug and they still dug, and they still failed to come up with the money.

Suddenly Miss Withers dropped her trowel. "What was that, Malone? Wasn't it a scream?"

"Sure. On the radio programs they always scream. Or maybe a tomcat on one of the fences. Back to work, we've got seventeen more bushes to disinter."

She bent down, and then straightened up again. "Malone, we're wasting time."

"You mean Ethel found the dough? Believe me if she had she'd be halfway across the world by now."

"Not that. But remember, Vance said the money was buried under *the*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rosebush, which he then replanted. Wouldn't that indicate — ?"

"That when he stashed it she had only one, and later she planted others?"

"You know nothing of roses, except perhaps Four Roses, which I believe is a brand of whiskey. We have only to look for the *oldest* rose — the bush with the thickest stem."

Which they did, and it was there under a foot of muddy earth: a bundle of bills big enough to choke a horse, or at least a pony, wrapped tight and dry in one of the plastic bags ordinarily used to keep vegetables fresh in the refrigerator. Malone reached out his hand, but Miss Withers dusted off the package and placed it firmly in her capacious handbag. "Not so fast," she said firmly. "The disposition of this blood money has to be discussed, and I intend to make one last appeal to your conscience. It isn't rightfully yours, or Eddie Vance's, and —" She stopped short.

From where they were standing, in one corner of the garden, they could see part of the side of the long narrow house. A light had suddenly come on in the windows of the front room!

"She's come home ahead of time!" the little lawyer gulped. They were trapped, just at the moment of victory. He glanced at the fence. "Do you suppose — ?"

"No, Malone. I couldn't climb that fence in my prime, which I am definitely not in. Nor could you. We've got to go out as we came in, if at all."

He nodded ruefully. "But *why* would she come back now?"

"I can guess. Suppose that on her way down to the studio Ethel just happened to remember that she had a *private* phone number, known to Eddie Vance but unlisted? So the TV people couldn't have picked her name out of the phone book for their program. She smelled a rat and came home. Now we're in for it."

"Maybe she'll get tired and go beddy-bye?" Malone suggested hopefully.

"You forget there's no second floor to the place. We have to go through her bedroom, and there's every chance that she'd wake up and grab a pistol and shoot us both for burglars — which in a sense we are." The schoolteacher shook her head. "I don't like any part of this, and besides I think I'm coming down with double pneumonia."

For an eternity of minutes the two conspirators huddled together in the chilly dark. Malone was shivering too, in spite of occasional nips at the trusty fifth in his topcoat pocket. "I'd rather dodge bullets," he whispered through chattering teeth, "than freeze to death. I'm going to reconnoiter. You wait here."

He tiptoed toward the back steps, but Miss Withers tiptoed right behind him.

"Where you go, I go," she told him firmly. "Up to a point, that is." They moved silently across the service porch, into the kitchen which was as dark as the bottom shaft of a coal mine, though somewhat warmer. Malone felt his way forward and into the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dining room, with Miss Withers sticking closer than a sand-burr. His cupped flashlight cast a faint glow ahead.

Through the bedroom they crept, toward the faint crack of light under the door. Malone waved Hildegarde back, and cautiously squatted in front of the keyhole.

"What do you see?" the schoolteacher whispered.

"Nothing but a piece of wall," he muttered. "Hildegarde, it's *too* silent in there!"

"Maybe she's gone out again?" Miss Withers suggested hopefully.

He turned the knob, a fraction of an inch at a time, and then softly pulled the door toward him. As it swung open, the bright lights of the living room half blinded them — and then they saw it. Miss Withers bit her knuckles to keep from crying out.

Ethel Megrim lay sprawled in the center of the rug, her limbs every which way — like a puppet loosed of its string. There was red seeping through the bleached honey-color of her hair, and blood on her face. As the two intruders bent over her, she raised herself a little and moaned something through bruised and battered lips. Then they heard her say, "He — he hurt me — I didn't *know*, I *didn't*—" Her body gave a convulsive shiver, and she fell back again.

"Do something, Malone! Get an ambulance!"

He shook his head, and surreptitiously crossed himself. "There's nothing for us to do now but make tracks out of here — and quick!"

Malone was mistaken about that. They weren't going anywhere, according to a pink-faced, burly man who stood in the door of the front hallway, hands in the pockets of his gray topcoat. To Miss Withers he looked at least half again as tall and as broad as he had looked that afternoon, pretending to read his newspaper in the lobby across the street.

"Officer, we can explain *everything!*" she cried quickly. "We were out in the backyard, and we heard a scream. . . ."

He came slowly forward, tense and frightening. "I heard a scream too," he said. His hand went into his pocket, and they caught the flash of metal. "Kelleher, Fourth Precinct. Get back against the wall, both of you." He looked down at the dead woman, almost incuriously. "Pistol-whipped her, eh?"

"But we don't even have a gun!" Malone put in. "You can search us! The person who did this must have got out through the front door —"

"And if you were watching the house from across the street you must have seen him go out!" finished the schoolteacher triumphantly. "You did, didn't you?"

"I'll ask the questions," the big man said. "First, who are you and what in hell were you doing in the backyard at this time of night?" He looked at them. "Making mud pies?"

"See my lawyer," said Miss Withers, nodding at Malone.

Malone gulped. "Look, officer — I'm John J. Malone, the attorney. Call

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Captain Daniel von Flanagan at Twelfth Street, he'll vouch for me. I hope!" the little lawyer added under his breath.

"Shut up. So you're Malone, eh? The criminal attorney who defended Eddie Vance — and now you're caught red-handed over the corpse of his former girl friend! This is bigger than I thought. What did you come here for, Malone? And where is it?" The big man took a .45 automatic out of his pocket. "I said, *where is it?*"

He had backed Malone against the wall and was deftly frisking him. Then he stood back. "Okay, take off your clothes and throw 'em over here to me!"

"*Please!*" gasped Miss Hildegarde Withers in horror, stumbling swiftly into the bedroom and closing the door firmly behind her. There were sounds of fervent protestations from Malone, which suddenly ended. There was no arguing with a detective who packed a .45, Miss Withers conceded. Again she thought longingly of that back fence — if somehow she could hoist herself over it . . . And then a better idea came to her.

But ten minutes later, when the door was flung open, she was standing in the bedroom, looking as innocent as a newborn babe is supposed to look — by anyone who has never seen a newborn babe.

"*Your* turn, sister!" announced Kelleher.

"Over my dead body!" the schoolteacher snapped. "You have no right even to suggest such a thing! When you call Headquarters to report this you can ask them to send a matron, but until then —" She raised her omnipresent umbrella menacingly.

"That's the law," put in Malone, "as you know very well, officer."

The man hesitated uncertainly, and then compromised by patting her exterior somewhat gingerly. Next he reached for her handbag. "Give, sister."

"Has a lady no privacy?"

"Not when it's homicide, she hasn't." He snatched the bag from her fingers and unceremoniously dumped the contents on the floor. It was Malone's turn to gasp — there was everything in that magpie's nest *except* Eddie the Actor's loot! The little lawyer stared at her in wonder.

"Blast it!" their captor swore, with trimmings. He hesitated for a moment, then made up his mind. He snatched the tie which Malone was at the moment replacing around his neck and tossed it to Miss Withers. "Tie his hands behind him — behind the back of that chair!" The gun waved menacingly, and the schoolteacher obeyed. The belt was whipped from Malone's waist, and she had to strap it around his ankles. Then, horror of horrors, she was herself tied up in the same fashion with curtains ripped from the windows. "There, I guess *you'll* stay put," said the man with the gun. And he disappeared into the back of the house, whence echoed sounds of a frantic search.

Miss Withers looked from Malone to the stiffening corpse on the floor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and back again. "For a policeman, he has very unorthodox methods," she said calmly.

"He's no cop," Malone agreed. "He didn't phone in, and cops in Chicago carry .38 pistols, not .45 automatics. He's obviously after that dough. Where'd you hide it?"

"Never you mind! We've got to get out of here, now!"

"Now, *how?*" the little lawyer asked reasonably.

"I tied you with a granny knot, naturally. It'll slip if you work at it."

"No!" But she had and it finally did, and they went into what was undoubtedly the fastest disappearing act in recent history. It was not until they were half a dozen blocks away that Malone slackened his pace and entered a drug store to telephone, emerging almost immediately. "That was quick," the schoolteacher remarked. "What did von Flanagan say?"

"I didn't talk to him. I just told the cop at the switchboard that I was a neighbor of Ethel Megrim's and that I'd heard a scream there . . ."

"But we ought to go back and be around when the police arrive!"

"You mean be around when that thug comes out shooting! And Hildegarde, he's a cinch to have found that money by now, wherever you hid it."

She shook her head, smiling a Mona Lisa smile. "No, Malone."

"Well, where is it?"

Another shake. "No, Malone."

"You don't trust me," the little lawyer said sadly.

"Of course I do — just the way I'd trust my poodle with a piece of T-bone. And now, if you don't mind, it's late and I'm wet and muddy and I've just had about all an old-maid schoolteacher can take for one day. Good night, Malone — phone me in the morning." And she popped into a waiting taxi and was off and away. Malone stared after her with some bitterness, and then noticed the lights of a Bar and Grill across the street, gleaming a welcome through the mist.

"With my luck it'll be a mirage," he muttered gloomily. But at this point even the mirage of a saloon would be better than nothing.

In the cold gray light of the early morning something awakened John J. Malone. He sat up in his own bed and gingerly shook his head to see if it would fall off, which it almost did but not quite. It was amazing that a man could get a hangover like this on one bottle and two bucks to spend in a bar; somebody must have liked the way he sang *By Killarney's Lakes and Dells* and set up the rest of the drinks.

Then the knock at the door came again, more insistently. He fumbled his way into a robe and shot the bolt. "Come in, Eddie," he said.

But it wasn't Eddie Vance, it was six feet of policeman in the shape of his ancient adversary, Captain Daniel von Flanagan, who almost trod on Malone's toes as he pushed his way into the room. He was smiling, but you could have refrigerated Death Valley in July with that smile. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

folded his arms. "I should have known better," said that worthy if thumb-fingered policeman with some bitterness, "than to trust a lawyer any time, anywhere."

"Wha-a — huh?" muttered Malone brilliantly. "Look, Captain, I haven't even had breakfast —"

"Well, pour yourself three fingers of breakfast and then talk. See if you can talk yourself out of having your meals behind bars for the next dozen or so years. Let's start with Ethel Megrim, huh?" He plumped himself down in a chair.

"Oh, *her*." Malone drank, choked, and drank again.

"Yes, her. She up and got herself murdered last night, as if you didn't know."

The raw whiskey hit Malone's stomach with a comforting warm thud, and rose slowly to dispel some of the fog in his brain. "And just *why* should I know?"

Von Flanagan snorted. "Because you yourself called Twelfth Street before the poor woman was cold, and reported it without giving your name. Only the man at the switchboard happened to recognize your golden tenor voice." Malone said nothing, and the other pressed on. "There's them downtown that think you yourself killed her."

"Me? Why?"

"Maybe because she came home unexpectedly and found you burglarizing her place, looking for that loot of Eddie Vance's. Maybe it was you who was digging up her backyard?"

Malone's mind was dashing about like a bird-dog in a thicket. "How can you say such a thing, Captain?" Von Flanagan made no answer, but he was staring significantly at the heap of muddy clothing flung on the radiator last night. The little lawyer winced, and decided to retire to previously prepared positions. "All right," he said resignedly, "I'll tell you. It was the fake cop who did it. When Miss Withers and I —"

"Not *her* again?" cried von Flanagan. "This is too much!"

"I was saying that when Miss Withers and I came in out of the backyard we took him for a cop attracted by the scream — he was in the doorway, only he must have been just *leaving* instead of just coming *in*. Only he hadn't got what he came for, and went along with the gag when he saw us, thinking that maybe we had it . . ."

"The dough — Vance's loot! And you did have it? Where is it, Malone? Did he get it?" The questions came thick and fast.

Malone shrugged. "I'll swear by all the saints in heaven, I'll swear by the memory of my blessed mother, God rest her soul, that I have no idea of where on earth that loot is, unless it's still somewhere in Ethel's house."

"Phooey! My men tore up every inch of the backyard, they ripped up floors and knocked out walls, and I'll swear that there isn't even so much as a postage stamp that they missed! But go on talking."

Malone talked as he dressed. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told the whole story, with some cautious emendations — all about the talkative woman next-door who had told Miss Withers's about Ethel's new boy friend who was a chauffeur or taxi-driver or something, about the fake summons from the TV studio that was supposed to keep Ethel safely out of the way, about the cop who wasn't a cop at all and who had tied them up while he went on searching the house . . . He told everything except about the money; at the moment that wasn't his secret anyway. "So there's your murder case, Captain," he concluded, "tied up in a bag. With Eddie Vance safe in prison, this guy started to cultivate the ex-girl friend, because he must have figured that she knew where the money was. Eddie's prison break forced his hand — he watched the house figuring Eddie might come there to pick up the cash. When Ethel left the house last night he tailed her, figuring maybe she was going to meet Eddie somewhere. She got wise, turned around, and came home, and he followed her in and tried to beat her into telling him where the loot was. But she couldn't tell him because she didn't know, and he lost his head and hit her too hard — just like he blew his top and killed that bank guard three years ago."

"*Shaw!*" cried von Flanagan triumphantly, as if it had been his own discovery.

"Who else? All you have to do is pick him up —"

"Phooey! If we couldn't pick up Shaw for that other killing after three years of trying, how do you expect us to pick him up for this one?" The policeman shook his head. "Get the rest of your clothes on, we're going down and see the D.A. This is one time you've overreached yourself, Malone."

The little lawyer thought fast. "And just what do you think Deputy District Attorney Harbin Hamilton will say when he finds out about a certain phone conversation we had yesterday?"

It didn't stop von Flanagan, but it slowed him down a little, and Malone worked fast on his temporary advantage. "I've got an idea," he said. "We're all in this pretty deep, but I see a way out. You want Eddie the Actor for prison break, you want the loot, and you want Shaw for two killings, right?" He went back to the selection of a tie, almost too casually. "What do you think of this one with the hand-painted flamingoes?"

"I wouldn't wear it to a dog fight. Yes, we want Vance and Shaw and the dough. But you've fixed it so all three slipped through our fingers . . ."

"Well, then," said Malone — and in a few well-chosen words he stuck his neck out farther than ever before in his checkered existence. It took some fast talking, but he was used to bedazzling twelve jurors and a judge, and von Flanagan was only one man and not too bright at that.

"It better work, before 7 o'clock tonight when I go off duty!" warned the detective from the doorway. "Or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I know somebody who'll get disbarred but fast." He went out, slamming the door. Malone sighed, and knotted the tie with the pink flamingoes, but his heart wasn't in it. And what to tell Hildegarde when he called her? He decided to fortify himself first with another drop, but had barely lifted the bottle when there came a knock at the door.

"Western Union for Mr. Malone."

Wearily he opened the door, "Come in, Eddie." This time it *was* Eddie Vance, shaking the drops from his uniform cap. He kicked the door shut behind him.

"Well, shyster? What luck?"

"Plenty," Malone said quickly. "Sit down and have a drink. I have every reason to believe that Miss — I mean Toledo Tillie — was successful, but it's a ticklish situation and I haven't got in contact with her yet. You see, Ethel Megrim got killed last night —"

"I heard," Eddie said. "Poor Ethel. But what about my dough?"

"Tillie is under wraps because of the murder, but she'll find a way to get in touch with me. Only we've got to be careful — von Flanagan was just here."

"I saw him in the lobby," said Eddie the Actor. "And if you're thinking of making a deal with him —" He patted his pocket with an evil grin. "I want my dough and I want it today, see?"

"You name the place and we'll be there, or at least she will. How about Field's basement at closing time, or the IC station at Randolph when the commuters are all going home? Or the south lion in front of the Art Institute?"

Eddie hesitated. "I like to work in the open. I guess the Art Institute is best. Six o'clock, okay?"

"Okay. You can take the dough, hand over my fee and Tillie's cut, and lose yourself in the crowd."

"Check. But tell her to be there on the dot. And don't foul this up, Malone, or you'll both be using a marble slab for a mattress, see?" He went out, slamming the door. Malone took a deep breath and a deeper drink, then called up Miss Withers. The schoolteacher was in a somewhat better mood than last night, and agreed to buy him a cup of coffee in fifteen minutes. He went out of the hotel through the rear service entrance, just in case von Flanagan wasn't trusting him, and shortly thereafter he was seated in the Palmer House coffee shop opposite his partner in crime. Her guilty conscience was not preventing her from attacking a copious repast of oatmeal and bacon and eggs, all of which made Malone feel slightly green.

They were both slightly green when he told her what he had promised von Flanagan to get rid of him. Miss Withers dropped her spoon. "No!" she cried.

"Yes," he said. "Look, you know where the dough is, so that takes care of Point One. We can deliver Eddie Vance, who's so crazy-mad for his loot that he'll walk into the trap —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'll phone von Flanagan to have his men at the Art Institute at six. Then all we've got to do is to get ourselves off the murder rap by locating Jack Shaw — unless he found where you stashed the money and is far away by now."

She shook her head. "I'm positive he didn't, or the police either. Let me think, Malone. We know Shaw is a cab-driver. If we checked all the taxi companies —"

"It would take days, and undoubtedly he's using a phony name. It isn't as if we had a picture of him," the little lawyer objected. They sat for a while in glum silence. Then the schoolteacher's long and faintly equine face lighted up like a lamp.

"But I *have* a picture of him, indelibly imprinted on my mind! Don't you see? The man has gone scot-free so far because he had no police record, no photos or fingerprints on file, and he wore a mask on the bank job. But now it's different. Now two people know what he looks like! Malone, do you know any friendly newspaper reporters?"

"I know all of them," he said with some pride. "And they're all friendly."

"Well, one of them is going to have a story for the early afternoon editions. Because it will help if while we're looking for Mr. Shaw *he* is looking for *us!* We'll spill the news that there are two eye-witnesses to the Megrim murder who can positively identify him!"

"A trap — with you and me as the cheese? Look, Hildegarde, isn't it enough to have Vance and the police on our tail without bringing Shaw into the act too? I'm too young and too wicked to die just yet." But Miss Withers prevailed, as she had a way of doing, and Malone went ahead and phoned one Ned McKeon at the *Herald-American.* "He says he'll squeeze it on page one somehow," the little lawyer reported. " 'Two unidentified witnesses, names withheld, at scene of the Megrim murder . . .' Only Shaw can identify *us* all right."

"And so perhaps can your friend Captain von Flanagan?"

Malone said that he wasn't sure von Flanagan could read, and that if he could, and did see the story, he'd probably keep his promise to hold off long enough to give them rope to hang themselves. They could only wait, and hope. The waiting, they decided, should be in or around Malone's office; his name and address were in the book and if Shaw came sniffing after the bait he would presumably come there first.

It was Miss Withers who brought up the moot question of what, if anything, they could do with or to Mr. Shaw if he did come. Malone thought. "*Maggie!*" he said.

"I have the greatest admiration for your secretary, but —"

"Maggie has a brother, and the brother has friends," Malone explained.

So it was that some hours later — about the time the *Herald-American* hit the stands — Miss Withers found herself staked out in the vacant suite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

across the hall from Malone's office, in the company of the little lawyer and two very tough-looking characters indeed, who had mumbled, "Pleasetameecha," and then settled down to a fast game of pinochle.

"Gangsters?" she whispered.

"Worse," Malone came back. "From the circulation department of the *Gazette* — to them murder and mayhem are jolly pastimes."

"Are they armed?"

"Tire irons and a length of heavy chain, I gather," he said.

So they waited and waited — and still waited. The hands of the old-fashioned watch pinned to the schoolteacher's old-fashioned blouse crawled around and around. There was no sound anywhere but the snap of the cards and the occasional tinkle of small change. Nothing happened, and nothing kept on happening. " 'The watched pot —' " quoted Miss Withers.

And then the phone rang suddenly in Malone's office across the hall, whose door had been left invitingly open. Malone leaped eagerly to answer it, since Maggie for obvious reasons had been given the afternoon off and sent out of the combat area. "Hello?" he cried breathlessly, Miss Withers leaning over his shoulder. "Hello? John J. Malone's office — hello?" He put down the phone in disgust. "They hung up on me!"

"You mean *Shaw* hung up on you! Obviously he was making sure you were here. Malone, it's working!" She almost did a little dance.

"It had better work, before 7 o'clock!" he came back grimly. "Von Flanagan is a man of his word and if we don't make that deadline . . ." He shuddered, and they went back across the hall, eyes glued to the crack in the door, ears keyed to the sound of approaching footsteps . . .

Five o'clock — then 5:15. "I can almost hear the clang of that cell door right now," Malone murmured sadly.

"Well," the schoolteacher said sensibly, "why not get out of town? My car ought to be fixed by now — we could be halfway to New York by morning."

"And von Flanagan could have Wanted flyers out for us before that. We'd be hauled back in handcuffs." They waited some more. It became 5:30, then 5:45. "That's that," said Malone. "We've just got time to get to the Art Institute and keep the date with Eddie Vance. Let's go." He borrowed a ten from Miss Withers and slipped it to their troops, who departed in some disappointment.

"Von Flanagan should certainly settle for two-thirds of what you promised," the schoolteacher said. "Getting Eddie the Actor — and the money —"

"Maybe," said Malone, without much hope. "He is a reasonable man, but not very." They hurried out of the building. There was a taxi at the head of the line, the driver a shortish stocky man deep in a racing form, a battered uniform cap over his eyes.

They hustled inside. "The Art Institute, and hurry," Malone ordered.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He leaned back in the seat, and refreshed himself from the remains of his bottle. It was the hour of densest traffic, and Miss Withers felt that they could have made better time by walking. Once or twice their driver cut through alleys with the dexterity of long practice, but always sooner or later they found themselves hemmed in with traffic again.

"Malone, isn't the Art Institute east of us, on the lake front?"

He barely opened his eyes. "Yes, Hildegarde."

"Well, our driver is going west."

"Probably making a circle to avoid the jam in the Loop."

She was silent for a block or so. "Malone!" she whispered. "Notice the door handles?"

He looked, then gaped — there weren't any! "Driver!" cried Malone, and tapped on the glass partition. The driver half turned, suddenly sitting up straight so that his bulk showed. He also showed an automatic pistol in his left hand, and his face was the face they had seen last in Ethel Megrim's living room over her dead body.

"*Shaw!*" gulped Malone.

Miss Withers was frantically pounding on the door window with her umbrella handle, and waving pleadingly at passers-by. One or two of them waved back at her, but that was all. She tried to scream . . .

Shaw rolled down the partition and waved the gun in their general direction. "Cut it out," he spat at them. "Or you'll get it here and now."

They cut it out. The man was driving like a madman, but evidently that was the way taxi-drivers were expected to drive. They beat red lights and raced past boulevard stops, heading west and south, with the driver keeping one eye on the rear-view mirror. Miss Withers moved a little closer to Malone, as if for comfort, but he caught her lips moving almost soundlessly. "Next stop — the one, two, three." He nodded a quarter of an inch . . .

There was a moving van at the next light, waiting for a left turn, and the taxi had to screech to a stop. Miss Withers kicked Malone sharply on the shin, and then her trusty umbrella came up like a striking snake, the crook of its handle around Shaw's neck, and she jerked with all her strength. The gun went off through the top of the cab and John J. Malone lovingly brought down his whiskey bottle on the man's head to finish the job. "Bull's-eye," said Miss Withers placidly.

It took only seconds for the little lawyer to climb over into the front seat, shove the unconscious Mr. Shaw to one side, and take the wheel. It had all happened so fast that they had rounded the corner and were a block or so north again before he remembered to pick up the uniform cap and put it on his own head.

"It's only ten after 6!" announced the schoolteacher. "Perhaps we can still make the Art Institute in time!"

Malone's only answer was to put his foot on the accelerator and his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand on the horn. A traffic cop or two whistled shrilly after them, but as luck would have it they met no minions of the Law on wheels, and soon they were rocketing up the Boul Mich, now heading north. They roared up before the Art Institute at last, to find the area practically deserted. There was no sign of Eddie Vance, no sign of von Flanagan and his men. Two husky street cleaners were sweeping the gutters nearby and putting refuse into a Department of Sanitation truck — but both were too tall and brawny to be Eddie Vance. The only other figure in the vicinity was an art student with owlish glasses and a smock who was painting a portrait of one of the benign stone lions against a background of lighted skyscrapers. He was obviously not Vance either.

"You'd better get out and look around and let yourself be seen," advised Malone. "I'll stay here and sit on Shaw — maybe you'd better give me your scarf so I can tie him up."

Hildegarde left the cab, strolled up the sidewalk for half a block, and then back again. It was almost six thirty, and she had a deep presentiment that they had missed the boat. Back at the steps of the Institute again, she paused to pat the north lion, paused again to admire the painting of the solitary artist . . .

There were two sharp beeps from a cab which had just pulled up in front of Malone's. "Taxi, Tillie?" It was a voice she recognized, though it now wore a mustache.

She leaped a foot in the air, and then started down the steps, her knees trembling like jello. Her eyes flashed this way and that in a desperate appeal for help — but there seemed no help in sight. Malone was either bent over his bottle or his prisoner, or both. There was nothing to do but to get into that second taxi — and what Eddie the Actor would say and do when he found she had doublecrossed him . . .

Eddie leaned back to open the door for her and she stumbled inside. The taxi moved ahead.

And then suddenly the truck from the Department of Sanitation pulled out squarely in their way. One of the street cleaners produced a riot-gun, the other a pistol. Wonder of wonders, the artist on the Art Institute portico ripped off his glasses, kicked aside his easel, picture and all, and turned out to be Captain von Flanagan. Miss Hildegarde Withers flung herself to the floor of the cab, both hands over her ears — and then it was all over, without a shot being fired. Eddie the Actor came out into the street, both hands held as high as he possibly could. When frisked, his pockets produced only a water pistol.

"Take him away," said Captain von Flanagan to the two street cleaners, who turned out to be crack detectives from Fifty-fifth Street. "And him too," he ordered, when Malone opened the other cab door and Mr. Shaw rolled out into the gutter.

Miss Withers took Malone's arm, and they stood there, waiting for von

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Flanagan's applause. But the Captain squirmed out of his smock, hurled it to the ground, and faced them belligerently.

"I'll never hear the last of this down at Twelfth Street," he growled. "And say, you — where's that loot you were supposed to deliver?"

Malone shrugged, and looked at Miss Withers. "I could tell you," she said, "but I'd rather show you — if you don't mind a trip to Ethel Megrim's house."

"We searched that place with a fine-tooth comb!" von Flanagan roared. "I'll eat my hat — or your hat or *anybody's* hat — if there's so much as a dime there!"

"Did you ever read *The Purloined Letter* by the late Edgar Allan Poe?" she inquired sweetly. Von Flanagan snorted, but it was nothing to the snort he snorted when, after a fast ride uptown in a squad car, she led them to Ethel's refrigerator and took from the vegetable compartment a plastic bag containing lettuce. Inside the lettuce was a wad of currency large enough to choke a horse, or a small pony. "The loot, Captain," she beamed. "As Poe definitely would not have said, 'Look for the lettuce in the lettuce.' I put it there while Shaw was searching Malone's clothing for it, since at the time I trusted neither Shaw nor Malone."

There was a long silence. "Hildegarde, you wrong me," said the little lawyer sadly. "I was always going to turn it in, wasn't I, Captain? Didn't I phone you when all this started and promise to deliver it if you'd keep hands off for a day or so?"

The policeman nodded.

"Well, then," said Miss Withers. "I owe you an apology, Malone. I thought you were after the money, or a large slice of it. But virtue, this time, is its own reward."

Malone smiled. "There are *other* rewards. This is bank loot, remember — and banks have surety companies. We should not do too badly. Now let's get out of here before Captain von Flanagan keeps his promise and eats your hat!"

Note:

If you enjoy ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE you will like some of the other MERCURY PUBLICATIONS:

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

MERCURY MYSTERY BOOKS

BESTSELLER MYSTERY BOOKS

JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Local Color and Literary Criminality

EQMM's revival of Jack London's wonderful tales of detection, crime, and mystery has won such widespread acclaim that we are encouraged to resurrect another American author of the past — an author so celebrated in his time that at one stage in their respective careers he far surpassed Mark Twain in literary reputation — an author who is conceded to have been one of the most important influences in the "development of American local-color fiction." We present that noted "argonaut and exile," Mr. Bret Harte.

Bret Harte was born in Albany, New York, on August 25, 1836, and he died in Surrey, England, on May 5, 1902. It can be said, in a phrase from his own wild West, that he "died with his boots on." In his near-65 years of life Bret Harte fashioned a colorful and romantic patchwork of pitiful failure and glorious success, of legend that depicted him as a "two-gun hero of a Western epic" and counter-legend that described him as an "effeminate young squirt who never even entered the mining country." It is not for us to assay the relative truth of legend or counter-legend; surely the multifarious activities in Bret Harte's life, his vocations and avocations, his pursuits and performances, tell their own fascinating story. In rough chronological order, Bret Harte was a youthful poet, an esthete and dandy, a pharmacist, teacher, miner, vagabond, express messenger (on a hazardous mountain route), Indian fighter (of this there is considerable question), typesetter, printer, editor, Secretary of the California Mint (a sinecure), humorist, sentimentalist, romanticist, dramatist (he collaborated with Mark Twain on the play "Ah Sin" which was produced but never published), lecturer, famous literary figure, expatriate, U. S. Consul, Grub Street hack de luxe, and in the end a man of enormous courage — the quiet, unostentatious courage of the intellectual rather than the physical type of man.

Most of the Bret Harte tales we plan to bring to you are the "forgotten" ones — not the famous stories like "The Outcasts of Poker Flat"; indeed, as in the cases of O. Henry and Jack London, you will be surprised at the number of crime and mystery short stories Bret Harte wrote, and particularly amazed at the classic purity of his occasional straight detective story. But behind the crime, mystery, and detection is Harte's forte — Western local color; for these are tales of stagecoaches and stately chivalry; of saloons and street shootings; of horse thieves and hasty justice; of

66

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gambling, gold mining, and gun-guards; of frontier lawlessness and early Western brutality — with a remarkable vitality still evident after more than half a century in which so many of Bret Harte's stories have merely gathered dust and endured neglect.

So we start with a tale of Yuba Bill, that hard-fisted stagecoach driver whose "irony was as devastating as a Sierran avalanche."

AN INGENUE OF THE SIERRAS

by BRET HARTE

WE ALL HELD OUR BREATH AS the coach rushed through the semi-darkness of Galloper's Ridge. The vehicle itself was only a huge lumbering shadow; its side-lights were carefully extinguished, and Yuba Bill had just politely removed from the lips of an outside passenger even the cigar with which he had been ostentatiously exhibiting his coolness. For it had been rumored that the Ramon Martinez gang of road agents were "laying" for us on the second grade and would time the passage of our lights across Galloper's in order to intercept us in the brush beyond. If we could cross the ridge without being seen and so get through the brush before they reached it, we were safe. If they followed, it would only be a stern chase with the odds in our favor.

The huge vehicle swayed from side to side, rolled, dipped, and plunged, but Bill kept the track as if, in the whispered words of the Expressman, he could "feel and smell" the road he could no longer see. We knew that at times we hung perilously over the edge of slopes that eventually dropped a thousand feet sheer to the tops of the sugar-pines below, but we knew that Bill knew it also. The half-visible heads of the horses, drawn wedge-wise together by the tightened reins, appeared to cleave the darkness like a ploughshare. Even the hoof-beats of the six horses had fallen into a vague, monotonous, distant roll. Then the ridge was crossed, and we plunged into the still blacker obscurity of the brush. Rather we no longer seemed to move — it was only the phantom night that rushed by us. The horses might have been submerged in some swift Lethean stream; nothing but the top of the coach and the rigid bulk of Yuba Bill arose above them. Yet even in that awful moment our speed was unslackened; it was as if the direction of Bill's huge machine was determined by other hands than his.

An incautious whisperer hazarded the paralyzing suggestion of our "meeting another team." Bill over-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard it. "It 'ud be only a neck-and-neck race which would get to hell first," he said quietly. Almost simultaneously the wider turnpike began to glimmer faintly as a visible track before us; the wayside trees fell out of line, opened up, and dropped off one after another; we were on the broader tableland, out of danger, and apparently unperceived and unpursued.

In the conversation that broke out again with the relighting of the lamps, Yuba Bill preserved a dissatisfied and even resentful silence. The most generous praise of his skill and courage awoke no response. "I reckon the old man waz just spilin' for a fight and is feelin' disappointed," said a passenger. But those who knew that Bill had the true fighter's scorn for any purely purposeless conflict were more or less concerned and watchful of him. He would drive steadily for four or five minutes with thoughtfully knitted brows, but eyes still keenly observant under his slouched hat, and then, relaxing his strained attitude, would give way to a movement of impatience.

"You ain't uneasy about anything, Bill are you?" asked the Expressman confidentially.

Bill lifted his eyes with a slightly contemptuous surprise. "Not about anything ter *come*. It's what *hez* happened that I don't exactly *sabe*. I don't see no signs of Ramon's gang ever havin' been out at all, and ef they were out I don't see why they didn't go for us."

"The simple fact is that our ruse was successful," said an outside passenger. "They waited to see our lights on the ridge and, not seeing them, missed us. That's my opinion."

"You ain't puttin' any price on that opinion, air ye?" inquired Bill politely.

"No."

" 'Cos thar's a comic paper in 'Frisco pays for them things, and I've seen worse things in it."

"Come off, Bill," retorted the passenger, slightly nettled by the tittering of his companions. "Then what did you put out the lights for?"

"Well," returned Bill grimly, "it mout have been because I didn't keer to hev you chaps blazin' away at the first bush you *thought* you saw move, and bringin' down their fire on us."

The explanation, though unsatisfactory, was by no means an improbable one, and we thought it better to accept it with a laugh. Bill, however, resumed his abstracted manner.

"Who got in at the Summit?" he asked abruptly of the Expressman.

"Derrick and Simpson of Cold Spring, and one of the Excelsior boys," responded the Expressman.

"And that Pike County girl from Dow's Flat, with all her bundles. Don't forget her," added the outside passenger ironically.

"Does anybody here know her?" continued Bill, ignoring the irony.

"You'd better ask Judge Thompson. He was mighty attentive to her, gettin' her a seat by the off window and lookin' after her bundles."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Gettin' her a seat by the *window*?" repeated Bill.

"Yes, she wanted to see everything, and wasn't afraid of the shooting."

"Yes," broke in a third passenger, "and he was so damned civil that, when she dropped her ring in the straw, he struck a match agin all your rules, you know, and held it for her to find it. And it was just as we were crossin' through the brush, too. I saw the hull thing through the window, for I was hanging over the wheels with my gun ready for action. And it wasn't no fault of Judge Thompson's if his foolishness hadn't shown us up and got us a shot from the gang."

Bill gave a short grunt, but he drove steadily on without further comment or even turning his eyes to the speaker.

We were now not more than a mile from the station at the crossroads where we were to change horses. The lights already glimmered in the distance and there was a faint suggestion of the coming dawn on the summits of the ridge to the west. We had plunged into a belt of timber when, suddenly, a horseman emerged at a sharp canter from a trail that seemed parallel with our own. We were all slightly startled; Yuba Bill alone preserving his moody calm.

"Hullo!" he said.

The stranger wheeled to our side as Bill slackened his speed. He seemed to be a "packer" or freight muleteer.

"Ye didn't get held up on the Divide?" continued Bill cheerfully.

"No," returned the packer, with a laugh. "*I* don't carry treasure. But I see you're all right, too. I saw you crossin' over Galloper's."

"*Saw* us?" said Bill sharply. "We had our lights out."

"Yes, but there was suthin' white — a handkerchief or woman's veil, I reckon — hangin' from the window. It was only a movin' spot agin the hillside, but ez I was lookin' out for ye I knew it was you by that. Good night!"

He cantered away. We tried to look at Bill's expression in the darkness, but he neither spoke nor stirred until he threw down the reins when we stopped before the station. The passengers quickly descended from the roof; the Expressman was about to follow, but Bill plucked his sleeve.

"I'm goin' to take a look over this yer stage and these yer passengers with ye afore we start."

"Why, what's up?"

"Well," said Bill, slowly disengaging himself from one of his enormous gloves, "when we waltzed down into the brush up there I saw a man, ez plain ez I see you, rise up from it. I thought our time had come and the band was goin' to play when he sorter drew back, made a sign, and we just scooted past him."

"Well?"

"Well," said Bill, "it means that this yer coach was *passed through free* tonight."

"You don't object to that — surely? I think we were deucedly lucky."

Bill slowly drew off his other glove.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've been riskin' my everlastin' life on this line three times a week," he said with mock humility, "and I'm allus thankful for small mercies. *But*," he added grimly, "when it comes down to being passed free by some pal of a hoss thief, and thet called a speshal Providence, *I ain't in it!* No, sir, I ain't in it!"

It was with mixed emotions that the passengers heard that a delay of fifteen minutes to tighten certain screw-bolts had been ordered by the autocratic Bill. Some were anxious to get their breakfast at Sugar Pine, but others were not averse to linger for the daylight that promised greater safety on the road. The Expressman, knowing the real cause of Bill's delay, was nevertheless at a loss to understand the object of it.

The station consisted of a stable, a wagon shed, and a building containing three rooms. The first was fitted up with bunks for the employees; the second was the kitchen; and the third and larger apartment was dining room, or sitting room, and was used as general waiting room for the passengers. It was not a refreshment station; there was no "bar." But a mysterious command from the omnipotent Bill produced a demijohn of whiskey, with which he hospitably treated the company.

The seductive influence of the liquor loosened the tongue of the gallant Judge Thompson. He admitted to having struck a match to enable the fair Pike Countian to find her ring which, however, proved to have fallen in her lap. She was "a fine, healthy young woman — a type of the Far West, sir — in fact, quite a prairie blossom! — yet simple and guileless as a child." She was on her way to Marysville, he believed, "although she expected to meet friends — a friend, in fact — later on." It was her first visit to a large town, or to any civilized center, since she crossed the plains three years ago. Her girlish curiosity was quite touching and her innocence irresistible. In a country whose tendency was to produce "frivolity and forwardness in young girls," he found her a most interesting young person. She was even then out in the stableyard watching the horses being harnessed, "preferring to indulge a pardonable healthy young curiosity than to listen to the empty compliments of the younger passengers."

She appeared to be a well-matured country girl, whose frank gray eyes and large laughing mouth expressed a wholesome and abiding gratification in her life and surroundings. She was watching the replacing of luggage in the boot. A little feminine start, as one of her own parcels was thrown somewhat roughly on the roof, gave Bill his opportunity. "Now there," he growled to the helper, "ye ain't carting stone! Look out, will yer! Some of your things, miss?" he added with gruff courtesy, turning to her. "These yer trunks, for instance?"

She smiled a pleasant assent and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bill, pushing aside the helper, seized a large square trunk in his arms. But from excess of zeal, or some other mischance, his foot slipped, and he came down heavily, striking the corner of the trunk on the ground and loosening its hinges and fastenings. It was a cheap, common-looking affair, but the accident discovered in its yawning lid a quantity of white, lace-edged feminine apparel of an apparently superior quality. The young lady uttered another cry and came quickly forward, but Bill was profuse in his apologies, himself girded the broken box with a strap, and declared his intention of having the company "make it good" to her with a new one. Then he casually accompanied her to the door of the waiting room, entered, made a place for her before the fire by simply lifting the nearest and most youthful passenger by the coat collar from the stool that he was occupying and, having installed the lady in it, displaced another man who was standing before the chimney. Drawing himself up to his full six feet of height in front of her, Bill glanced down upon his fair passenger as he took his waybill from his pocket.

"Your name is down here as Miss Polly Mullins?" he said.

She looked up, became suddenly aware that she and her questioner were the center of interest to the whole circle of passengers and, with a slight rise of color, replied, "Yes."

"Well, Miss Mullins, I've got a question or two to ask ye. I ask it straight out afore this crowd. It's in my rights to take ye aside and ask it — but that ain't my style; I'm no detective. Ye needn't answer it ef ye don't like; ye've got a friend over there — Judge Thompson — who is a friend to ye, right or wrong, jest as any other man here is — as though ye'd packed your own jury. Well, the simple question I've got to ask ye is *this*: Did you signal to anybody from the coach when we passed Galloper's an hour ago?"

We all thought that Bill's courage and audacity had reached its climax here. To openly and publicly accuse a lady before a group of chivalrous Californians, and that lady possesing the further attractions of youth, good looks, and innocence, was little short of desperation. Judge Thompson, with a bland smile, began; "Really, Bill, I must protest on behalf of this young lady" — when the accused, raising her eyes to her accuser, to the consternation of everybody answered, "*I did.*"

"Ahem!" interposed the Judge hastily, "er — that is — er — you allowed your handkerchief to flutter from the window — I noticed it myself — casually, one might say even playfully —"

The girl, regarding her apologist with a singular mingling of pride and impatience, returned briefly: "I signaled."

"Who did you signal to?" asked Bill gravely.

"The young gentleman I'm going to marry."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A start, followed by a slight titter from the younger passengers, was instantly suppressed by a savage glance from Bill.

"What did you signal to him for?" he continued.

"To tell him I was here, and that it was all right," returned the young girl, with a steadily rising pride and color.

"Wot was all right?" demanded Bill.

"That I wasn't followed, and that he could meet me on the road beyond Cass's Ridge Station." She hesitated a moment, and then, with a still greater defiance, said, "I've run away from home to marry him. And I mean to! No one can stop me. Dad didn't like him just because he was poor, and dad's got money. Dad wanted me to marry a man I hate, and got a lot of dresses and things to bribe me."

"And you're taking them in your trunk to the other feller?" said Bill grimly.

"Yes, he's poor," returned the girl defiantly.

"Then your father's name is Mullins?" asked Bill.

"It's not Mullins. I — I — took that name," she hesitated, with her first exhibition of self-consciousness.

"Wot *is* his name?"

"Eli Hemmings."

A smile of relief and significance went round the circle. The fame of Eli or "Skinner" Hemmings as a notorious miser and usurer had passed even beyond Galloper's Ridge.

"The step that you're taking, Miss Mullins, I need not tell you, is one of great gravity," said Judge Thompson, "and I trust that you and your affianced have fully weighed it. May I ask you what you know of the young gentleman for whom you are sacrificing so much and, perhaps, imperiling your whole future? For instance, have you known him long?"

"Oh, yes, nearly a whole year."

"And," said the Judge, smiling, "has he a business?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "he's a collector."

"A collector?"

"Yes; he collects bills, you know — money," she went on, with childish eagerness. "Not for himself — *he* never has any money, poor Charley — but for his firm. It's dreadful hard work, too — keeps him out for days and nights, over bad roads and baddest weather. Sometimes, when he's come over to the ranch just to see me, he's been so bad he could scarcely keep his seat in the saddle, much less stand. And he's got to take mighty big risks, too. Times the folks are cross with him and won't pay; once they shot him in the arm, and he came to me and I helped do it up for him. But he don't mind. He's real brave — jest as brave as he's good." There was such a wholesome ring of truth in this pretty praise that we were touched in sympathy with the speaker.

"What firm does he collect for?" asked the Judge gently.

"I don't know exactly — he won't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tell me; but I think it's a Spanish firm. You see" — she took us all into her confidence with a sweeping smile of innocent yet half-mischievous artfulness — "I only know because I peeped over a letter he once got from his firm, telling him he must hustle up and be ready for the road the next day; but I think the name was Martinez — yes, Ramon Martinez."

In the dead silence that ensued — a silence so profound that we could hear the horses in the distant stable-yard rattling their harness — one of the younger Excelsior boys burst into a hysteric laugh. The young girl, however, took no note of it. She went on:

"Yes, it's mighty hard work, but he says it's all for me, and as soon as we're married he'll quit it. He might have quit it before, but he's mighty proud — if he is poor — is Charley. Why, thar's all ma's money which she left me in the Savin's Bank that I wanted to draw out — for I had the right — and give it to him, but he wouldn't hear of it! And so he goes on ridin' and ridin' and gettin' more and more played out and sad, and thin and pale as a spirit, and always so uneasy about his business. Why, he must have rid miles and miles to have watched for me thar in the brush at the foot of Galloper's tonight, jest to see if all was safe; and Lordy! I'd have given him the signal and showed a light if I'd died for it the next minit. There! That's what I know of Charley — that's what I'm running away from home for — that's what I'm running to him for, and I don't care who knows it! And I only wish I'd done it afore — and I would — if — if — if — he'd only *asked me!*"

She stopped, panted, and choked. Then one of the sudden transitions of youthful emotion overtook the eager, laughing face; it clouded up with a lightning quiver of expression, and — then came the rain!

We smiled feebly at each other with that assumption of masculine superiority which is miserably conscious of its own helplessness at such moments. Yuba Bill, who was kicking the logs in the fireplace, suddenly swept down upon us and bundled us all into the road, leaving Miss Mullins alone. Then he walked aside with Judge Thompson for a few moments, re-entered the station, reappeared with the young lady, suppressed a faint idiotic cheer which broke from us at the spectacle of her innocent face once more cleared and rosy, climbed the box, and in another moment we were under way.

"Then she don't know what her lover is yet?" asked the Expressman.

"No."

"Are you certain it's one of the gang?"

"Can't say for sure. It mout be a young chap from Yolo who bucked agin the tiger[1] at Sacramento, got regularly cleaned out and busted, and joined the gang for a flier. They say thar was a new hand in that job

[1] Gambled at faro.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over at Keeley's — and a mighty game one, too; and ez there was some buckshot onloaded that trip, he might hev got his share, and that would tally with what the girl said about his arm. See! Ef that's the man, I've heered he was the son of some big preacher in the States, and a college sharp to boot, who ran wild in 'Frisco. They're the wust kind to kick when they once get a foot over the traces. For stiddy, comf'ble kempany," added Bill reflectively, "give *me* the son of a man that was hanged!"

"But what are you going to do about this?"

"That depends upon the feller who comes to meet her."

"But you ain't going to try to take him? That would be playing it pretty low down on them both."

"Keep your hair on, Jimmy! The Judge and me are only going to rastle with the sperrit of that gay young galoot when he drops down for his girl — and exhort him pow'ful! Ef he allows he's convicted of sin and will find the Lord, we'll marry him and the gal off hand at the next station and the Judge will officiate himself for nothin'. We're going to have this yer elopement done on the square — and our waybill clean — you bet!"

"But you don't suppose he'll trust himself in your hands?"

"Polly will signal to him that it's all square."

"Ah!" said the Expressman.

The coach stopped finally near the junction of a small crossroad. At the same moment Miss Mullins slipped down from the vehicle and, with a parting wave of her hand, disappeared in the semi-obscurity. To our surprise the stage waited, Bill holding the reins listlessly in his hands. Five minutes passed — an eternity of expectation and an aching void of silence) This was at last broken by a strange voice from the road:

"Go on — we'll follow."

The coach started forward. Presently we heard the sound of other wheels behind us. We all craned our necks backward to get a view of the unknown, but by the growing light we could only see that we were followed at a distance by a buggy with two figures in it — evidently Polly Mullins and her lover. We hoped that they would pass us. But the vehicle, although drawn by a fast horse, kept its distance always, and it was plain that its driver had no desire to satisfy our curiosity. The Expressman had recourse to Bill.

"Is it the man you thought of?" he asked eagerly.

"I reckon," said Bill.

"But," continued the Expressman, returning to his former skepticism, "what's to keep them both from levanting together now?"

Bill jerked his hand towards the boot with a grim smile. "Their baggage."

"Oh!" said the Expressman.

"Yes," continued Bill. "We'll hang on to that gal's little frills and fixin's until this yer job's settled and the ceremony's over, jest as ef we waz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her own father. And, what's more, young man," he added, suddenly turning to the Expressman, "*you'll* express them trunks of her through to Sacramento with your kempany's labels and hand her the receipts and checks for them, so she can get 'em there. That'll keep him outer temptation and the reach o' the gang until they get away to civilization again. When your hoary-headed ole grandfather or, to speak plainer, that partikler old whiskey-soaker known as Yuba Bill, wot sits on this box," he continued, with a diabolical wink at the Expressman, "waltzes in to pervide for a young couple jest startin' in life, thar's nothin' mean about his style, you bet!"

When the station hotel and straggling settlement of Sugar Pine, now distinct and clear in the growing light, at last rose within rifleshot on the plateau, the buggy suddenly darted swiftly by us — so swiftly that the faces of the two occupants were barely distinguishable as they passed — and, keeping the lead by a dozen lengths, reached the door of the hotel. The young girl and her companion leaped down and vanished inside as we drew up.

The material appetites of the passengers, sharpened by the keen mountain air, were more potent than their curiosity. As the breakfast-bell rang out at the moment the stage stopped, a majority of them rushed into the dining room and scrambled for places without giving much heed to the vanished couple or to the Judge and Yuba Bill, who had also disappeared.

In the course of twenty minutes, however, there was a slight and somewhat ceremonious bustling in the hall and on the veranda, and Yuba Bill and the Judge reappeared. The latter was leading, with some elaboration of manner and detail, the shapely Miss Mullins, and Yuba Bill was accompanying her companion to the buggy. We all rushed to the windows to get a good view of the mysterious stranger and probable ex-brigand whose life was now linked with our fellow-passenger. Handsome and even cultivated-looking he assuredly was — young and vigorous in appearance. But there was a certain half-shamed, half-defiant suggestion in his expression, coupled with a watchful lurking uneasiness which was not pleasant and hardly becoming in the possessor of such a bride. But the frank, joyous, innocent face of Polly Mullins melted our hearts again and condoned the fellow's shortcomings. I think we would have given three rousing cheers as they drove away if the omnipotent eye of Yuba Bill had not been upon us. It was well, for the next moment we were summoned to the presence of that soft-hearted autocrat.

We found him alone with the Judge in a private sitting room, standing before a table on which there were a decanter and glasses.

"Gentlemen," Bill said slowly, "you was all present at the beginnin' of a little game this mornin', and the Judge thar thinks that you oughter

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be called in to take a partin' drink to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Charley Byng — ez is now comf'ably off on their bridal tower. What *you* know or what *you* suspects of the young galoot that's married the gal ain't worth shucks to anybody, and I wouldn't give it to a yaller pup to play with, but the Judge thinks you ought all to promise right here that you'll keep it dark. That's his opinion. Ez far as my opinion goes, gen'l'men," continued Bill, with greater blandness and apparent cordiality, "I wanter simply remark, in a keerless, offhand gin'ral way, that ef I ketch any God-forsaken, lop-eared, chuckle-headed blatherin' idjet airin' *his* opinion —"

"One moment, Bill," interposed Judge Thompson with a grave smile; "let me explain. You understand, gentlemen," he said, turning to us, "that there is nothin' in this request which, in your capacity as good citizens and law-abiding men, you may not grant. You are condoning no offense against the statutes; there is not a particle of legal evidence before us of the criminal antecedents of Mr. Charles Byng except that which has been told you by the innocent lips of his bethrothed, which the law of the land has now sealed forever in the mouth of his wife. Our own actual experience of his acts has been in the main exculpatory of any previous irregularity — if not incompatible with it. Briefly, no judge would charge, no jury convict, on such evidence. When I add that the young girl is of legal age, that there is no evidence of any previous undue influence, but rather of the reverse, on the part of the bridegroom, and that I was content, as a magistrate, to perform the ceremony, I think you will be satisfied to give your promise, for the sake of the bride, and drink a happy life to them both."

I need not say that we did this cheerfully and even extorted from Bill a grunt of satisfaction. The majority of the company who were going with the through coach to Sacramento, then took their leave; and, as we accompanied them to the veranda, we could see that Miss Polly Mullins's trunks were already transferred to the other vehicle under the protecting seals and labels of the all-potent Express Company. Then the whip cracked, the coach rolled away, and the last traces of the adventurous young couple disappeared in the hanging red dust of its wheels.

But Yuba Bill's grim satisfaction at the happy issue of the episode seemed to suffer no abatement. Standing comfortably with his back to the now deserted barroom, he was more than usually loquacious with the Expressman. "You see," he said, in bland reminiscence, "when your old Uncle Bill takes hold of a job like this, he puts it straight through without changin' hosses. Yet thar was a moment, young feller, when I thought I was stompt. It was when we'd made up our mind to make that chap tell the gal fust all what he was. Ef she'd rared or kicked in the traces, we'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hev given him jest five minits' law to get up and get and leave her, and we'd hev toted that gal and her fixin's back to her dad again. But she jest gave a little scream and start, and then went off inter hysterics, right on his buzzum, laughin' and cryin' and sayin' that nothin' should part 'em. Gosh! If I didn't think *he* woz more cut up than she about it. I reckon he's had enough of stayin' out o' nights to last him, and ef the valley settlements hevn't got hold of a very shinin' member, at least the foothills hev got shut of one more of the Ramon Martinez gang."

"What's that about the Ramon Martinez gang?" said a quiet voice.

Bill turned quickly. It was the voice of the Divisional Superintendent of the Express Company — a man of eccentric determination of character, and one of the few whom the autocratic Bill recognized as an equal. His dusty pongee cloak and soft hat indicated that he had that morning arrived on a round of inspection.

"Don't care if I do, Bill," he continued, in response to Bill's gesture, walking to the bar. "What were you saying about the Ramon Martinez gang? You haven't come across one of 'em, have you?"

"No," said Bill with a slight blinking of his eye, as he ostentatiously lifted his glass to the light.

"And you won't," added the Superintendent, leisurely sipping his liquor. "For the fact is, the gang is about played out. Since the new instructions to the agents to identify and trace all dust and bullion offered to them went into force, you see, they can't get rid of their swag. All the gang are spotted at the offices, and it costs too much for them to pay a fence or a middleman of any standing. Why, all that flaky river gold they took from the Excelsior Company can be identified as easy as if it was stamped with the company's mark. They can't melt it down themselves; they can't get others to do it for them; they can't ship it to the Mint or Assay Offices in Marysville and 'Frisco, for they won't take it without our certificate and seals; and *we* don't take any undeclared freight *within* the lines that we've drawn around their beat except from people and agents known. Why, *you* know that well enough, Jim," he said, suddenly appealing to the Expressman, "don't you?"

Possibly the suddenness of the appeal caused the Expressman to swallow his liquor the wrong way, for he was overtaken with a fit of coughing.

"No, sir," resumed the Superintendent cheerfully, "they're pretty well played out. And the best proof of it is that they've lately been robbing ordinary passengers' trunks. There was a freight wagon held up near Dow's Flat the other day and a lot of baggage gone through. I had to go down there to look into it. Darned if they hadn't lifted a lot o' woman's wedding things from that rich couple who got married the other day out at Marysville. Looks as if

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they were coming down to hardpan and the bedrock — eh?"

The Expressman's face was turned anxiously towards Bill who, after a hurried gulp of his remaining liquor still stood staring at the window. Then he slowly drew on one of his large gloves. "Ye didn't," he said with a slow, drawling, but perfectly distinct articulation, "happen to know old 'Skinner' Hemmings when you were over there?"

"Yes."

"And his daughter?"

"He hasn't got any."

"A sort o' mild, innocent, guileless child of nature?" persisted Bill with a yellow face, a deadly calm, and Satanic deliberation.

"No. I tell you he *hasn't* any daughter. Old man Hemmings is a confirmed old bachelor. He's too mean to support more than one."

"And you didn't happen to know any o' that gang, did ye?" continued Bill, with infinite protraction.

"Yes. Knew 'em all. There was French Pete, Cherokee Bob, Kanaka Joe, One-Eyed Stillson, Softy Brown, Spanish Jack, and two or three Mexicans."

"And ye didn't know a man by the name of Charley Byng?"

"No," said the Superintendent with a distraught glance towards the door.

"A dark stylish chap, with shifty black eyes and a curled-up mersstache?" contined Bill.

"No. Look here, Bill, I'm in a little bit of a hurry — but I suppose you must have your little joke before we part. Now, what *is* your little game?"

"Wot you mean?" demanded Bill, with sudden brusqueness.

"Mean? Well, old man, you know as well as I do. You're giving me the very description of Ramon Martinez himself! No, Bill, you didn't play me this time! You're mighty spry and clever, but you didn't catch me then!"

He moved away with a light laugh. Bill turned a stony face to the Expressman. Suddenly a gleam of mirth came into his gloomy eyes. He bent over the young man and said in a hoarse, chuckling whisper:

"But I got even after all!"

"How?"

"He's tied up to that lying little she-devil, hard and fast!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

An off-trail story about a mysterious disappearance in faraway New Guinea and a courageous little missionary who set out to find the truth . . . "Alike Under the Skin" is the work of Hugh B. Cave who has been a popular magazine writer for more than twenty years. Born in England some 40-odd years ago, Mr. Cave was brought up in New England and has traveled extensively. During World War II, he was a war correspondent in the Pacific — which, with his travels, accounts for the undeniable authenticity of his jungle atmosphere, South Pacific background, and his deep understanding of the people of Papua. But even more important is what the little missionary believed in: there may be misguided people, the Reverend Mr. Shaw admitted, misguided people who need help — but there are no bad people, whatever their color . . .

ALIKE UNDER THE SKIN

by HUGH B. CAVE

THE *Guiding Light* LANDED THE Reverend Mr. Shaw at Biwai on a Monday morning, having spent the whole of the Sabbath struggling upriver from the Gulf of Papua. Since it would be at least three months before she called again at that lonely New Guinea station, a small mountain of stores was put ashore with the Reverend Mr. Shaw and then carried up to the house.

MacKenzie, her glum New Zealand skipper, had his doubts about leaving Mr. Shaw there at all. "I don't like the looks of it, Reverend. Are you sure you'll be all right?"

"Quite all right, Captain."

"This place is a far cry from anything you've been used to, believe me. You go slow with that 'all alike under the skin' business and keep in mind what happened to Mr. Witherby."

"We don't know what happened to Mr. Witherby," Mr. Shaw said.

"We can guess."

"Then I choose to guess he was drowned or got lost in the jungle." And with a smile that betokened complete peace of mind, Mr. Shaw completed his farewells and watched the schooner depart.

He was disappointed in the station. The grassy plateau on the river bank was pleasant enough, but from his study of reports written by his unfortunate predecessor he had pictured a substantial bungalow. This was falling in ruin, as was the pathetically small chapel beside it. Moreover, he had expected to find Mr. Witherby's na-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tive teacher, Siwi, living and working here, but the station had apparently been abandoned since Mr. Witherby's mysterious disappearance three months before.

In search of his teacher, Mr. Shaw promptly set out along the path to nearby Biwai Village — a little man in his forties with spindly legs and a baldish head, who, having served eight years in the Solomons and New Hebrides, thought nothing of striding unescorted into a strange native community. People were simply people, quite alike under the skin. The warnings he had received in Port Moresby and at mission stations along the coast were surely so much nonsense.

At Biwai he was taken aback to find the entire population massed before the long-house, awaiting him. Obviously he had been watched from the moment of his arrival. But with outstretched hand he advanced and introduced himself.

His proffered hand was ignored.

Little Mr. Shaw smiled to show he was not offended. "I have come to find Siwi," he explained.

"Siwi is not here."

"But he must be here. This is his village."

"He has gone away."

Mr. Shaw decided not to press matters until he had won their confidence. He smiled again. "I shall need help in putting the station back on its feet," he said to the headman. "Will you select half a dozen boys from those who volunteer and send them over in the morning?"

The headman shrugged.

Returning to the station, Mr. Shaw spent the rest of the day putting things to rights. It was hard work. The stores had to be packed away, the house cleared of rats' nests and spider webs. Night fell before he was half finished.

But when the moon rose and he sat on the veranda with a cup of tea, he considered himself quite well off. The river glowed in silver splendor. The smells of the jungle were warm and sweet. Time would sweep away all problems, he told himself, and he went to bed to sleep like a child.

In the morning, however, no one came from the village to help him.

He was puzzled. According to Mr. Witherby's reports, the people of Biwai Village had been most cooperative. But he was not despondent. It never paid to hurry these things. He could wait. There was work enough to keep him busy.

One day while sitting on the chapel roof, patching holes in the rusty metal, he was surprised to see a ketch on the river, creeping upstream under power. She stopped at the station's rickety landing and a large barefoot man in soiled white trousers — a white man with a bristling red beard — climbed the muddy path to the compound. Halting below Mr. Shaw with hands on hips he peered up.

"Heard there was a new chum here," the man said. "Didn't believe it. Never thought they'd find a big enough fool to take the job. How are you, pastor?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Shaw slid down the iron slope and dropped to the ground. Happily he shook the man's hand. "I didn't dream there was another English-speaking soul within fifty miles!"

"I look in here now and then. Name's Tomkins. Will Tomkins."

"You're a trader, of course."

Tomkins grinned. "What else would a sane man be in this forsaken spot?"

With a solemn smile Mr. Shaw led his visitor to the house, where he seated him on the veranda and produced a bottle of medicinal brandy for the trader's pleasure. "Perhaps you can provide an answer to a question that has been troubling me," he said hopefully. "Did you know Mr. Witherby's teacher, Siwi?"

"I knew him."

"Can you tell me where he is?"

The big man in soiled trousers sipped his drink and regarded Mr. Shaw with an owlish stare. "If he wasn't killed along with Witherby, pastor, the chances are he's a thousand miles from here and still running."

"You — you say Mr. Witherby was killed. Have you proof?"

"I don't need proof or want it," Tomkins said. "I've trouble enough with the people on this river without holding a murder over their heads. Your Mr. Witherby was murdered right enough, though. He went to Gewari Village once too often."

"Gewari," Mr. Shaw repeated, frowning. He had seen the name in some of his predecessor's reports. It was a large village several hours upstream, a troublesome place in which Mr. Witherby had worked diligently, but in vain, to win a foothold. "*The abuse I suffer there is hardly to be imagined*," Mr. Witherby had written on one occasion. "*Tuamu, their chief, seems determined to make trouble for the mission all up and down the river.*"

Mr. Shaw pulled himself together. "Have you been to Gewari since Mr. Witherby disappeared?" he asked.

"A time or two."

"And you honestly believe —"

"If you mean did I see Witherby's head stuck on a pole — no. I've got sense enough to mind my own business, pastor."

"But when the Resident Magistrate was here with his constabulary, did he not —"

"He went to Gewari, sure. But don't fool yourself that Tuamu didn't know he was coming. If you're smart, you'll stay clear of that place. Gewari's got no love for missionaries."

With his gaze fixed on the trader's bearded face, Mr. Shaw said quietly, "Why do you go there, Mr. Tomkins?"

"For pottery. Tuamu's people make the best to be found along this coast. I take it in trade for hatchets, cloth, knives" — fishing a cheap jackknife from his pocket, he leaned forward to place it in Mr. Shaw's hand — "and on the way back to Moresby I swap it for copra."

Mr. Shaw examined the knife with interest and would have passed it back, but Tomkins waved it aside and stood up.

"Well, pastor, I'll stop by on my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way back and collect your mail if you have any. Thanks for the brandy. Meanwhile, if you've got to save souls, keep out of Gewari and save 'em closer to home."

The following week, having finished repairing his chapel, Mr. Shaw went to Gewari. For a lone white man that was no mean undertaking. Borrowing a canoe at the village near the mission was not difficult, but no one could be persuaded to accompany him. So, kneeling as in prayer, he plied his own paddle and steadfastly pushed his hollow log upstream through the sweltering hours of the morning.

Gewari, he discovered, was a rambling community on the low left bank of the stream, some of the huts standing like grotesque water birds in the river itself. Climbing from his canoe to a rickety catwalk twenty feet long, he found himself confronted by an army of naked children. Silently they watched his every step, apparently hoping he would slip and plunge ignominiously into the reeking mud. Disappointed when he didn't, they parted to let him through.

When told that he sought Tuamu, they clutched at his hands and clothing and all but dragged him to an impressively large house under what must have been the largest betel-nut palm in all New Guinea.

Mr. Shaw hesitated, puzzled that only the children had come to the riverfront to greet him. Now he saw why. Under the areca palm with its brilliant red fruit the bare ground was littered with clay pottery. Even as he waited for the headman to appear, several of Tuamu's people came to add to the display, glancing at him only briefly as they did so.

Obviously Tomkins, the trader, had called on his way upriver, advising the Gewaris he would stop again to barter on his way back.

"What do you want here?"

Mr. Shaw recoiled in spite of himself. It was not hard to believe the worst of the man at whom he found himself staring. Tuamu, headman of Gewari, was small and ugly, with a gashed lip curled to display a startling mouthful of betel-blackened teeth.

"Why," said Mr. Shaw unsteadily, "I want to be friends. I want to talk."

"I have no time for talk now."

"I can wait. When you are finished —"

"We know your kind of talk," Tuamu snorted. "Save your breath. My people have lived a long time in this land. We know what we know."

Mr. Shaw did his best and even managed to say a few words, but the chief was in no mood to listen. Almost at once he interrupted by spitting a stream of betel juice, red as blood, at the ground between the missionary's feet.

"We want no misi here!" he snarled. "We need no white men telling us we are as good as they! Go back to your station before there is trouble!" He spat again and turned away, striding back into the house.

Mr. Shaw gazed unhappily at the doorway. To force his way into the house would be unwise. To apply him-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self to Tuamu's people against their chief's wishes might be dangerous. He had come a long way to be spat at, but there would be other days.

A forlorn figure, hands in pockets, he trudged back to the riverfront. This time the children kept their distance.

All but one. Waiting on the catwalk was a sturdy youth of sixteen or so, about Mr. Shaw's own height, who blocked the way as the missionary sought to reach his canoe.

"You go back to your station, misi?"

"It seems that I must," Mr. Shaw answered wearily.

Without invitation the boy dropped into the canoe and reached up to give him a hand. "I go to visit my mother's people in Biwai. Take me with you to paddle."

Mr. Shaw was too discouraged to argue.

The boy was a good companion. He handled the canoe deftly and once, when the treacherous current carried it into the upthrust roots of a dead tree, he leaped out, knife in hand, to cut it free — quite as though there were no crocodiles in a hundred miles. When his tongue loosened, he revealed that his name was Dorigi and he was no less than a son of Chief Tuamu's brother. Mr. Shaw learned much from him of life at Gewari, and even more of the mysteries of the jungle through which they glided.

As they neared Biwai late in the afternoon, Dorigi, still tirelessly paddling, asked a seemingly innocent question. "Do you have a boy to keep house for you at the station, misi?"

"There has not been time to find one."

"You need such a boy?"

"I could use a little help of *some* sort," Mr. Shaw admitted wryly.

Dorigi solemnly nodded. "Tonight I sleep with my mother's people. Tomorrow I come to work for you."

Mr. Shaw wondered if he would, but had little time to think about it. Toiling up the path from the station landing after putting his passenger ashore at the village, he found a man awaiting him at the bungalow.

Puzzled, he clasped a thin brown hand thrust out in greeting while his gaze traveled over his caller's odd attire. Threadbare black trousers, a white shirt, and a rag of black tie were strange garments for a native! "Who —?" he began.

"I am Siwi, Mr. Witherby's teacher."

"Siwi!" Mr. Shaw gripped the man's bony arms and gazed delightedly into his cadaverous face. "You've come back!"

"Captain MacKenzie found me at Daru and told me you were here."

"I knew you'd come!" Excitedly Mr. Shaw pulled him inside, sat him down and leaned forward, hands on knees, to stare at him. Now, at last, things would be different!

But in less than a moment the great joy vanished.

"There is no doubt at all about what happened," Siwi told him, gazing gloomily at the floor. "On the day he disappeared, Mr. Witherby

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

left here at daybreak to go to Gewari. I would have gone, too, but there was unrest everywhere. Had the station been left unguarded, it might have been plundered."

The teacher's lugubrious voice became a sigh. "So I stayed behind, and when Mr. Witherby did not return at nightfall I knew something terrible had happened. All night I waited, walking up and down the veranda. In the morning I went to find him. But no one had seen him."

"I don't understand."

"They lied, of course. They knew what had happened but would not tell me. I went all the way to Gewari, stopping at every village. No one knew *anything*. In the end I returned to the station and sent word to the Magistrate. But I dared not wait for him. It was only a matter of time before Mr. Witherby's murderers would kill me, too. So I went away."

Mr. Shaw stood with his clenched hands upraised. "I refuse to believe it!"

"Every word is truth," Siwi sighed. "Look at me. Would I have fled from my own people without cause?"

"But why?" Why would the Gewaris murder a man who did them no harm?"

"They are bad people."

For years Mr. Shaw had been sustained through loneliness and hardship by his belief in the essential goodness of man. "There are no bad people, Siwi," he said now, angrily. "There may be misguided ones who need help, but there are no bad ones!" Then he fell silent, fretfully shaking his head while his small hands clasped and unclasped themselves until they were the color of Tuamu's spittle.

When low in spirit, little Mr. Shaw had always found hard work an excellent restorative. Give him a hammer and some boards, let him build something, and he could scale the walls of the pit itself. But as a partner in such an enterprise Siwi was hopeless. Tall and gaunt, long of face, he paraded about the station like a professional mourner.

Exactly the opposite was Dorigi, the Gewari boy who arrived on schedule to become Mr. Shaw's house boy. In Dorigi, industrious as an ant and cheerful as a monkey, the missionary found someone to lean on.

The two came to know each other well in the following few days. During that interlude the chapel acquired new benches, the house new furniture. Evenings, Mr. Shaw taught English and asked questions.

In that department alone, the answering of questions, was Dorigi a disappointment.

"But if you were at Gewari the day Mr. Witherby went there, you *must* have seen him," Mr. Shaw would say.

"No, misi. I did not."

"Very well, you were absent from the village at the time of his visit." Mr. Shaw was treading on delicate ground and tried to walk softly. "You were off in the bush — hunting, perhaps. But surely when you returned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you heard some talk of what had happened."

"I heard nothing, misi."

Mr. Shaw was afraid to probe further. His job, after all, was not to find Mr. Witherby's murderers — the government would attend to that — but to carry on Mr. Witherby's work. He was dismayed to discover that Siwi, the teacher, did not share his views.

"We can do nothing until the guilty ones are punished," Siwi insisted. "I know my people!"

"The guilty are punished in heaven."

"Of course. But that takes too long." Gloomily the teacher wagged his head. "If you persist in keeping Dorigi here, our time may be short indeed."

"Why?"

"He is from Gewari. He is a son of Tuamu's brother. In *my* mind, there is no doubt that Tuamu sent him here to make trouble."

"Nonsense," Mr. Shaw said firmly, and to show that he meant it he made Dorigi a present of a khaki shirt and a pair of khaki trousers. The boy at once ran to put them on.

That night was one of the hotter nights and Mr. Shaw went to bed early. Vainly waiting for sleep to come, he tossed and turned on the sticky sheet while Dorigi clattered about in the kitchen and Siwi monotonously paced the veranda. The racket in the kitchen subsided at last. Siwi plodded to his room. Mr. Shaw heard his heavy shoes fall one by one to the floor, and the bed creaked. Then for a time the only sound was the machinelike hum of the mosquitoes and the everlasting keening of the frogs.

Half an hour must have passed. Mr. Shaw was just dozing off. All at once he sat up, sniffing. With a shout, he flung himself out of bed.

He had a bad moment then. The net caught his legs and he fell to the floor, frantically struggling to free himself. Somehow he managed it, even in the dark, and burst out of the room at top speed. Smoke poured from the kitchen.

In the corner a pile of trash blazed furiously.

The wall there was as old as the house itself and tinder-dry. Mr. Shaw stumbled forward, straddled the water cask by the wood stove and flung water on the flames with his cupped hands. He thought his arms would drop off.

The flames subsided. He lifted the cask — no mean accomplishment for a man of his size — and poured the rest of the water on the smoking heap, just to be sure. Then, out of breath, he slumped onto a stool which he and Dorigi had knocked together just the day before.

Siwi, frowning at him from the doorway, said dourly, "I told you so."

"He couldn't have done it on purpose," Mr. Shaw protested.

"Then where is he? Why has he run away?"

"He was frightened."

"If he is only frightened, we will find him hiding somewhere."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They searched the house and chapel, the small outbuildings and the riverfront. Dorigi had vanished, new clothes and all.

Later, while putting away the cot on which the boy had slept in a corner of the kitchen, Mr. Shaw found the knife. He had paid no particular attention to it before, beyond admiring the skill with which the boy used it. Now he examined it with care.

It was a new knife, a mate to the one Tomkins had placed in the missionary's hand. But, thought Mr. Shaw, Tomkins had done no trading at Gewari prior to his visit. The trader had only stopped there to prepare the village for a later call.

He put the knife away and wondered if Dorigi would return to claim it. Dorigi didn't.

For several days Mr. Shaw did little but think and weigh his conclusions. Then he made up his mind. One evening, gazing across the supper table into the unhappy face of his assistant, he made an announcement.

"In the morning I shall go to Gewari again," he said calmly.

"It is not safe!" Siwi objected.

"It is necessary. You were right, Siwi. The people will have nothing to do with us until the mystery of Mr. Witherby's disappearance has been cleared up."

"You too will disappear if you go to that place," Siwi predicted.

"We shall see."

True to his word, Mr. Shaw departed for Gewari at daybreak. He went alone, not sorry to be denied the company of his doleful assistant. The people of the upstream villages silently watched him pass.

Arriving at Gewari shortly before noon, he made his canoe fast and climbed to the catwalk. The people had seen him coming. They watched him in silence as he made his way toward the headman's house. He was relieved when Tuamu appeared suddenly in the doorway of the hut under the betel-nut palm.

The array of pottery was still there, he noticed. It had grown in size. Tomkins, then, was still trading on the upper river.

Fully aware of how much depended on the first words he spoke, Mr. Shaw faced the chief. He wet his lips. If he failed this time, there would be no third try, he was certain. Nor would the missionary society risk other men on this troublesome river. The station would be abandoned.

"Tuamu," he said earnestly, "you must listen to me."

The ugly man fingered a dogs'-tooth necklace at his throat and made a face by letting his gashed lip droop lower. "What have we to talk about?"

"Many things. Very many. Let me sit down."

"Am I sitting?"

Mr. Shaw sensed a movement behind him and turned his head. The women and children had withdrawn. The men were moving up to form a semicircle three or four deep at his back, barring his retreat to the river. Some, he noticed, were armed with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spears and clubs. From a corner of his eye he caught a glimpse of khaki — the shirt and trousers he had given to Dorigi.

"Very well." He forced himself to ignore the gathering storm. "Suppose we begin with the man named Tomkins. What has he been telling you about me, Tuamu?"

"Tomkins is no friend of mine!"

"Nor of mine. And if I am not mistaken, he has been trying to make sure that you and I shall not be friends of each other."

The chief looked beyond his caller to the half circle of waiting men. "I clasp the hand of no white man, misi!"

"You make a mistake in judging a man by his color."

"I make no mistake. I —"

"Because under the color we are alike, good or bad according to what lies in our hearts. Would we be any different, you and I, if we took paint and —"

Mr. Shaw halted, aware that he was in danger of launching into a sermon for which Tuamu's people had not the patience. "Let us talk about Tomkins," he said, and took a step forward, scowling at his blunder.

That was his mistake.

They might have listened to more had he remained motionless. His scowl and sudden movement set fire to the fuse. It seemed to him that the half circle of men simply rolled in upon him like a breaking wave full of sound and fury.

Startled, he turned to face the wave and was engulfed. A spear flashed at him. A dozen hands pawed at him. His protests were lost in the uproar.

There was but one thing to do. Using his arms as windmills, he drove straight into the sea of naked bodies and burst through it into the open. Then with a speed that must have astounded them, he ran — not for the river where they would overtake him before he could launch his canoe, but for the jungle beyond the houses.

The forest closed about him and he plunged on, a hunted animal with the pack in full cry, seeking no path but darting through tangles of thorny shrubs, bamboo, and lawyer vine which in a saner moment would have baffled him. He ran far before he could run no more, but at last, exhausted, he fell behind a rotten log and lay still.

He heard them seeking him. By the shrillness of their voices he knew what his fate would be if they found him. At times the voices were far off, as in a dream; at times the dream was a nightmare. But the nightmare became reality whenever he lifted his head and saw the spears in the hunters' hands.

When it seemed safe, he stood up. Almost at once another voice, this one a kind of warning hiss, caught and held him.

"Misi!"

He turned, ready to run for his life again. Toward him, limping, came his erstwhile house boy, Dorigi.

Dorigi stumbled against him and pulled him down. "Misi, are you hurt?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No," Mr. Shaw said dazedly. "But you are — you're hurt badly!"

"Trying to reach your side, I stepped in the way of a spear." The boy brushed away Mr. Shaw's hands. "What will you do, misi? How will you get back to the station?"

Mr. Shaw had not thought of getting back to the station, only of saving his life. He saw now that without a boat his future was dark. But Dorigi answered the question for him.

"We will go downriver through the bush, misi. I know the way."

Mr. Shaw frowned at the spreading red stain on the boy's khaki trousers.

"It is no snare," Dorigi said quickly, misinterpreting the pause. "Misi, I did not set fire to your house on purpose, believe me. I was taking the fire from the stove and —" Mr. Shaw's accusing gaze silenced him and Dorigi looked guiltily at the ground. "It may be true that I promised the trader, Tomkins, to make trouble for you and took a knife in payment. But after you and I became friends I changed my mind."

"Why did you run away, then?"

"I knew what you would think."

Mr. Shaw placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Why do your people hate me so, Dorigi?"

"Because of what Tomkins told them, even before you came here. Whoever came to take Mr. Witherby's place, he said, would have them punished for killing Mr. Witherby.

"And did they kill Mr. Witherby, Dorigi?"

"No, misi."

"Yet they made much trouble for him."

"Because he threatened us when we traded with Tomkins. He meant well, I think. Tomkins cheats us, but we must sell our pottery to someone."

Mr. Shaw had one more question. "On the day Mr. Witherby disappeared, was Tomkins on the river?"

"He left Gewari that morning, misi, on his way to the coast."

And met Mr. Witherby and got into a violent argument with him, Mr. Shaw thought; *and after killing him, threw the body to the crocodiles or hid it in the jungle where it will never be found. We may never be able to prove it, but surely that is what happened.* With a worried glance at Dorigi's bloody trousers he stood up. "I am ready."

Obediently the boy glided into the jungle.

Mr. Shaw realized very quickly that they could never reach the station. That jungle on the gulf coast of Papua was the worst he had ever encountered. A native with sound legs might have found a way through it, but never a white man and never, no matter how courageous, a boy as badly hurt as Dorigi. After five minutes he called a halt.

"This is no good, Dorigi. We must get to the river and find a canoe."

"They will be watching the river, misi."

"Nevertheless, it is our only hope."

"As you wish." Dorigi pointed himself in the proper direction and trudged on. But not far. After a few faltering steps he collapsed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Shaw knelt beside him and looked at the leg. He knew an ugly wound when he saw one. He took off his shirt and made a bandage. Still on his knees, he considered the problem.

He had to have a canoe, and quickly. With a canoe he could reach the station in a few hours. If Tuamu's people would not let him return with medicine to save Dorigi's life, he could send what was needed with instructions for using it. But how to steal a canoe, with the Gewaris waiting at the river to pounce on him?

It could be done. He and Dorigi, though far apart in age, were about the same size and build. The Gewaris would be watching for a man in a white shirt and dark trousers. Seeing one in khaki they would say. "It is only Dorigi hunting the hated missionary as we do."

His mind made up, he worked swiftly, then bent over the boy and peered into his face. "If they catch me, Dorigi, you will know it by the noise they make. Call out then and they will find you. To lie here for long would mean death."

"Yes, misi."

"But if I get away, stay here and wait, because the medicines I will bring back or send you will be better than those of the witch doctor. Do you understand?"

"Yes, misi."

He pressed the boy's hand in farewell. Rising, he made for the river.

Unmolested, he emerged from the maze of jungle a hundred yards below the village landing place. There were many boats on the broad brown flow before him. Some crept up and down the stream while their occupants peered at the silent shores; others lay on the muddy slope before the village, where Tuamu's people hurried about on nameless errands concerned with the hunt. Even the women were in evidence. And for the children it was something of a holiday.

Something else was there, too. Moored to the crooked poles supporting the end of the catwalk was Tomkins's ketch, an incongruous touch in that barbaric setting. Tomkins himself sat on a deck chair in the shade of an awning, sucking a pipe and languidly watching the proceedings.

I was wrong, Mr. Shaw thought; *there are some bad people in this world.*

Choosing a canoe some distance from the nearest activity, he stepped from the shelter of the jungle and went boldly toward it. Would his disguise deceive them? It seemed impossible. His way of walking would betray him, he felt, even though he had left his shoes at the jungle's edge. If not his walk, then surely his nervousness would give him away.

He was certain that every eye was watching him. Under the khaki shirt his heart was a hammer. *I am not a brave man*, he thought; *I talk a lot but have no faith.*

Fifty feet he had to go.

Then Forty.

Thirty.

They seemed to be paying no attention, the men in their canoes on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the river, the women at the landing place, the scampering children. Were they playing with him? Would Tomkins see through the ruse and give the alarm?

Twenty feet more.

Then he saw Tomkins snatch the pipe from his mouth and lean from the chair, gazing straight at him.

Ten feet!

The missionary's hand shook as he reached for the carved prow of the dugout.

Thud!

With a sigh of resignation Mr. Shaw halted. Inches from his fingers, the spear quivered there in the wood. He turned. They would give him time, perhaps, to tell them about Dorigi. He hoped so. Watching them converge upon him, he clasped his hands. *Our Father which art in heaven . . .*

Tuamu, halting squarely before him, placed the point of a barbed spear against the third button of the khaki shirt. "You are either a fool or a very brave man, misi. Why do you wear these clothes that belong to my brother's son?"

Mr. Shaw sighed. Out of a corner of his eye he saw Tomkins descending from the catwalk and strolling along the river's edge toward him. Perhaps the man meant to intercede, perhaps—

The hope died when he saw the look of amusement on the trader's face. Tight-lipped, Mr. Shaw turned back to Tuamu, drew himself up, and returned the ugly man's gaze without flinching.

"Your brother's son is hurt and needs help. I hoped to escape to the station and return with the medicine he needs. I thought — in these clothes — you might mistake me for him."

"Mistake you for him?" Tuamu echoed, frowning.

On the face of Tomkins appeared an expression of incredulity. Then he laughed. "By heaven!" he said loudly. "That's rich! All alike in the eyes of God, eh? The crazy fool believes his own preaching!" He came a step closer, leering. "Only Tuamu's eyes are not God's eyes, pastor — you can take my word for it."

Mr. Shaw was confused and said nothing. The headman peered at him for a long moment in silence, then turned and spoke to the others. Men, women, and children crowded closer to stare. Mr. Shaw did not understand their murmurings.

But Tomkins did. The leer vanished abruptly from the trader's face. Sudden anxiety replaced it.

"Now see here, Tuamu," Tomkins said hoarsely, "don't be a fool!"

Tuamu disdainfully waved him to silence and stepped forward. His hand came up to touch Mr. Shaw's cheek. Mr. Shaw stood stock still, aware that the touch was gentle, that the bitterness in the chief's gnarled features had inexplicably softened.

Tomkins, in desperation, tried again. "Don't be a fool, I tell you! He was only trying to escape —"

"Be quiet," Tuamu snapped. "Misi, where is Dorigi?"

"In — in the bush," Mr. Shaw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

faltered. "Let me take him to the station where I can heal him."

"And then you will come back? So we can talk?" Tuamu lowered his spear.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Shaw quickly.

Tomkins, with an oath, wheeled and strode back toward his boat. They all watched him. He was perhaps halfway when Tuamu said something in a low voice to the assembled throng. Instantly a score of men took after the trader.

Tomkins began to run.

"No, no, Tuamu," Mr. Shaw protested. "You mustn't!" But the headman seemed not to hear.

At top speed Tomkins raced onto the catwalk, with the first of his pursuers only a few yards behind. He must have seen then that he had no chance. Even if he reached the boat, there would not be time to cast her off. He flung his arms over his head and jumped off the catwalk in a desperate dive. As his pursuers skidded to a halt, the water parted to receive the trader.

"Let him go, Tuamu!" Mr. Shaw begged. "The government will attend to him. I promise!"

Tuamu watching the water, said nothing. The men on the catwalk said nothing. The whole village, Mr. Shaw realized, was still as a grave. Perhaps, after all, they did intend to let the fellow go. If they had meant to stop him, they would have their spears ready to hurl at him when he reappeared . . .

A minute passed. Two. Three. Tomkins did not reappear. Tuamu raised his voice in a command, and the men on the pier stopped staring at the river and turned toward him. The chief reached impatiently for Mr. Shaw's hand. "Come. Let us find Dorigi."

"But," Mr. Shaw said faintly, "but —"

"We can do nothing for Mr. Tomkins," Tuamu shrugged. "On that side of the pier there is no water. Only mud. Deep mud." He pulled Mr. Shaw away.

Repressing a shudder, the missionary looked down. The headman's hand clung to his own and he stared at the two hands as though in a dream.

Only then, when he saw brown fingers clasping white ones, did he understand the nature of the miracle which had brought peace and understanding to the river. In masquerading as a native he had worn Dirigi's clothes, walked like Dorigi, even tried to think like Dorigi; but he had forgotten one thing — the color of his skin.

He simply hadn't given it a thought.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

Speaking of detective stories, is it possible that some of us, strictly as readers, are taking things for granted? Or even — the greater sin — expecting too much? To show you what we mean, we are now going to give you a real "oldie," a much better-than-average example of the detective story that flourished in the "good old days" — a short story by (hold on to your hat!) the great Nick Carter himself. Now, mind you, this is not a modern version of the Nick Carter who is still going strong in radio, magazines, and movies; this is a real oldtimer, slightly edited and condensed (but only slightly), a genuine, authentic, dyed-in-the-pulp, all-blood-and-a-yard-wide Nicholas Carter short story which had its original magazine appearance in 1894 and was first published in book form in 1899 — in a phrase, vintage Nick.

Perhaps you would be interested in a few historical and bibliographic facts about Nick Carter who at his peak, according to his publisher's statements, "knew more about writing detective stories than any other single person" (a strange contention since it is well known that "Nick Carter" was always a syndicate of writers). Still quoting from the publisher, the Nick Carter adventures were "conceded to be among the best detective tales ever written," and the name Nick Carter "stands for a good, clean, swiftly moving detective story at a price within the reach of the most modest purse." And it is true that by 1920 more than 30,000,000 copies of Nick Carter stories had been sold.

The world's outstanding authority on and collector of Dime Novels is Charles Bragin of Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Bragin — our very good friend — tells us that Nick Carter made his debut in 1889, in a serial story in Street and Smith's "New York Weekly." The first Nick Carter story was titled THE OLD DETECTIVE'S PUPIL; OR, ON THE SIDE OF LAW AND ORDER. *Its earliest appearance in book form was in 1894, as a 25-cent paperback novel. Its true author? Well, we can't be absolutely certain — many claimed authorship later on, when Nick Carter became a sensational best-seller and a household name; but research indicates that either John Coryell or Eugene Sawyer was probably the "culprit."*

By 1897 no less than 282 Nick Carter stories had been published. Between 1897 and 1912 the staggering number of 819 more appeared in print. And between 1912 and 1915 an additional 160 Nick Carter books were offered to his vast public. Thus, by 1915, the incredible total of 1261

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nick Carter books had been written, published, and literally gobbled up by his enthralled readers!

Now, how many of these 1261 different books were volumes of short stories? The answer is almost unbelievable. So far as we have been able to check, only one *of the 1261 was a volume devoted exclusively to short stories about the great Nick — only one! The other 1260 were either full-length novels or collections of novelettes. The single book of shorts has the curious title,* THE DETECTIVE'S PRETTY NEIGHBOR AND OTHER STORIES. *It first appeared as a magazine series in 1894 and was published in book form in 1899. It is one of the eleven short stories in this book that we now bring to you.*

And what kind of tale is this Nick Carter short story? Well, it offers many of the tried and true (by now, you understand) 'tec traits. In this adventure of the great detective you will (1) be at his side when he makes a minute examination of the scene of the crime; you will (2) see the finger of suspicion point to the heroine and (3) watch the hero being framed; you will (4) be regaled with the theme of unrequited love and (5) witness a noble sacrifice at great personal danger; you will (6) shudder at the ill-advised flight of the chief suspect and (7) follow the detective, a human bloodhound if there ever was one, track the suspect down; you will (8) observe the great sleuth don a quick-change disguise and make a "marvelous assumption of a different character" — in which no man is ever supposed to have been the equal of Nick Carter; you will (9) find surprising sociological implications, especially of the caste system circa 1890; you will (10) thrill to the use of psychological third degree and the resulting violent climax; you will (11) applaud the triumph of true love as, in the deep morality of all Dime Novels, good conquers evil; and last but not least, you will (12) be treated to a surprise (!) solution — yes, all this and more in, believe it or not, a mere 6000 words! ! !

Oh, nostalgia!

Oh, the dear dead past!

Oh, the good old gumshoe days . . .

So, we beg you, please do not take the modern detective story for granted, or worse, expect too much. For the simple truth is — and this has been our 'tec thesis — the detective stories being written today are among the finest of all time, and this is especially true of detective-crime short stories — as readers of EQMM, we hope, will agree.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BY A SINGLE HAIR;

or, Anna Wilton's Secret

by NICK CARTER

A CRY OF MORTAL FEAR CANNOT BE counterfeited, nor can it be misunderstood. Hear it, and your heart will leap and tremble like that other heart which, from the brink of eternal stillness, sends its last appeal for help or sympathy. Therefore, the cry that rang through Norton Hall struck terror to a hundred listeners.

It was not especially loud, and, but for the meaning in it, would have excited little interest. For Norton Hall was the home of a hundred girls, and the sudden appearance of a mouse in any of its rooms might have been the cause of noisier outcry.

Moreover, the clock on the tower of Norton Hall had just struck 9. Study hours were over; and the natural reaction from severe mental exercise was likely to take the form of lively physical exertion.

In short, it was quite the custom in Norton College to discourage, with pillows or other harmless missiles, a tendency on the part of the studious to prolong work beyond the regular hours. A girl suddenly interrupted in an algebraical problem by the shock of a well-aimed pillow would naturally scream; but not as somebody screamed that evening in Norton Hall!

Following that cry came the noise of many doors opening. Trembling voices repeated the question: "What was it?"

This was easier to answer than the next frightened query: "Whence did it come?"

Some said that it came from the upper hall while others were sure that it came from the second corridor, or from the ground floor, where there were only recitation rooms and the chapel, all empty at that hour. A few said that the cry came from the grounds outside the Hall.

All was confusion, and in the center of it appeared the tall form of Miss Austin, the registrar of the college faculty, influential both by her office and her natural firmness of character.

Gradually, from a center of confusion she became a center of order.

It required but a few minutes for her to assure herself that the shrill scream had not come from any of the rooms in the upper hall where her own was situated. Then she hastened to the next floor. As she descended the stairs she ran her sharp eyes over the excited throng and missed a face that should have been there.

"Where is Miss Wilton?" she called.

Nobody answered. Every girl looked at her next neighbor. Then a confused murmur arose which gradually became intelligible.

"Lottie Hyde isn't here, either!"

Reprinted with the permission of Street & Smith Publications, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exclaimed one of the girls; and it was noticeable that they all drew back from a certain door which was closed, though most of the other doors on the corridor were ajar.

Anna Wilton and Lottie Hyde were chums, and that was the door of their room.

The girls live well at Norton College. Education costs more there than it does at Wellesley. Some of the rooms in the main hall are designed to give every comfort, and are furnished luxuriously. The door at which the frightened girls were now staring gave entrance into a study, as well appointed as a study could be; and the adjoining bedroom was a dainty nest indeed.

Miss Austin walked to the door with a steady step, though her heart beat fast. She could see that the room was lighted, yet neither of the girls who should have been inside responded to the instructress' knock.

After five seconds Miss Austin turned the knob. The door was locked.

She had a passkey which would open the spring lock in case the latch had not been set upon the other side. She tried this key, but at first it would not throw back the bolt. The catch had been set, but evidently with a hasty hand, for it did not hold firmly; and, after repeated efforts, the lock yielded and Miss Austin entered.

A few of the boldest among the students pressed up to the door and looked in. Nothing alarming was visible, and then others gained courage. A dozen more were on the point of following when a chorus of screams sent them scurrying back.

It was Miss Austin who first made the discovery, but four or five of the girls were less than a second behind her.

The large study table in the center of the room had concealed that which lay upon the floor.

It was the body of Lottie Hyde.

Miss Austin set her lips firmly. At the same instant she moved the student's lamp on the table so that its light was thrown straight down upon the corpse of the girl.

That it was a corpse she had not doubted, for her first glance had fallen upon the white and rigid face, and the staring, sightless eyes.

The light glanced down upon the girl's rich dress, a sort of tea gown, but with suggestions of another age and nation in its flowing lines and rich profusion of color. There were ornaments on it of a curious design, simulating great scales of gold. And something on the bosom might have been mistaken for one of those ornaments except that it was fixed too rigidly.

It was the handle of a knife that had been driven straight into the girl's heart.

Miss Austin rose from beside the body, and in a voice which she tried to steady, said:

"Help me lift her up. We must put her on this couch."

The few girls who had not fled from the room came forward and lifted the body of their schoolmate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When it had been laid upon the couch, one of the girls pointed to the handle of the knife.

"We should draw it out," she said.

A murmur of horror went through the group. Not even Miss Austin had the courage to touch the weapon.

The girl who had pointed to it laid her hand upon the gilded haft, and pulled strongly. All the others turned their heads away.

There was the sound of a heavy fall. The girl who had withdrawn the knife had fallen in a dead faint, and lay there with the bloodstained weapon still in her hand.

So there was renewed confusion while she was being restored. This did not take long. In five minutes she stood there apparently as composed as the others.

"You had better go to your room, Miss Howard," said the instructress to her. "I would not strain my nerves further tonight."

"Do you know why I fainted?" asked Miss Howard, in an awestruck voice.

No one answered. Something in her tone — the suggestion of a mystery — silenced all.

"Because," she continued, "I realized, just as I touched the knife, that it was Anna Wilton's; and" — she shuddered as she spoke — "Anna is not here."

In the confusion incident to the discovery of the body, everyone had forgotten the absence of Miss Wilton.

To Miss Austin, at least, the shock of this fact was more terrible than even the finding of Lottie Hyde's dead body.

It must have flashed through all the minds that no possible explanation of the murder could clear Miss Wilton of suspicion. Even if her hand had not struck the blow, why was she absent? Why did she not return?

"They may have killed her, too!" cried one of the girls hysterically.

Miss Austin felt that the horrors of that room were beginning to overwhelm her. Yet she knew that a sign of weakness in her would mean panic for all — for the hundred students in the building. Then, too, she saw that Alice Howard was gaining in composure as the others lost it.

"I must not be less calm than that girl," said the instructress in her heart; and the thought restored her.

"We must search the building," she said sharply. "The grounds, too. Some of you go to the Old South and summon all the men."

The Old South was a small brick building which had been the birthplace of the college. It had been outgrown, and in late years had been transformed into a residence for the venerable president, the Rev. James Norton. Two male instructors in the college were members of the president's household, and he employed three men as servants.

Miss Austin, though at most times she considered herself independent of men, was willing to admit that this was an occasion so exceptional as to call for the speediest possible assistance from the sterner sex.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was not easy, however, to secure volunteers to go across to the Old South. The girls were afraid to venture out into the night. Their imaginations filled the shadows under the great trees with nameless horrors.

"Ring the great bell!" suggested Miss Austin, in desperation.

It was, in fact, the most sensible thing to do. The bell was in a tower over the middle of Norton Hall, and the rope hung down into an alcove which was light and easily accessible.

A score of girls rushed for the rope, and presently the big bell sent out such a clangor in the night as its metal throat had never uttered before.

While this was being done, Miss Austin and some of the more courageous girls were making a search. Most of them simply ran up and down the halls, with little idea what they were seeking. Miss Austin went into the pretty bedroom, but she found nothing.

Alice Howard, after standing for a minute or more gazing down upon the face of her dead schoolmate, walked straight to the large window of the room. It looked out upon a balcony, unconnected with any other window. Heavy curtains hung there. On drawing them aside, Miss Howard found that the window was wide open. And on the balcony, against the iron railing, and half-supported by it, lay Anna Wilton.

"She is here!" called Miss Howard.

Miss Austin and several of the girls came running to the spot. They carried Anna Wilton to her bed.

There was a wound just above her right temple, but it was trivial. Otherwise there was no evidence that she had suffered any injury.

She was totally unconscious, but to Miss Austin's experienced eye it was clear that this was only a faint.

"She will come to herself in a few minutes," said the teacher. "Then we shall learn the secret of this terrible night."

"Perhaps," murmured Alice Howard.

It is now necessary to say a few words about the two girls most intimately concerned in this dreadful occurrence.

One would have said that there was nothing unusual about them, except, perhaps, the beauty of Lottie Hyde. She was of the blonde type, and an illustration of the best that nature can do with gold, blue, and creamy white. Her face, though perfectly regular in repose, was intensely mobile. There were moments when her eyes were almost black, and flashed out a purpose which was emphasized by her heavy, silken brows. At other times she was all smiles and dimples. But a close observer might have questioned whether the sentiment of her mind could always be inferred from the expression of her countenance. There was certainly no fairer face in Norton College, but there were many that were more honest.

The reverse might have been said of Anna Wilton. Her face was not beautiful, but it was open as the day. She had brown eyes, and dark hair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that had a bronze hue when the sunlight touched it. Her figure was slender and girlish; indeed, she was one of the youngest of the students, whose ages ranged from seventeen to twenty-four. Her family — distinguished in many walks of life — had been wealthy for 200 years, and she showed the indefinable marks of birth and breeding.

Miss Hyde was the daughter of a New Yorker who was worth a million dollars one year, and was a million dollars in debt the next. At this particular time he was on the wrong side of Fate's ledger, but he seemed to have enough money to spend on his daughter, which was the only really important matter to her way of thinking.

Well, that is all past now. His wealth cannot buy pleasures for her, nor his poverty bring her pain, as she lies upon that couch. Even her beauty is gone. The terror and anguish of a single moment have torn it from her face as if it had been a mask.

Now hurried steps are heard in the halls — heavier steps than before. The men have come; and striding before all the others is the aged president of the college, erect beneath the burden of nearly fourscore years.

But his wisdom and experience can do little here. He gives orders that there must be watchers for the dead, and physicians for the living. As to the mystery, he can only wait; and he feels a presentiment that it will prove much deeper than it seems.

There is but one opinion among the students. They shudder as they speak of it, but they believe, almost all of them, that Anna Wilton drove that dagger into her friend's breast. As for President Norton, he does not believe that, though he has no reason for a contrary opinion except that deceptive trust in the reading of the human face.

"She is a good girl," he thinks. "She would not have harmed anyone."

But he happens to hear Alice Howard addressing a group of girls.

"I can see no other possibility," says Miss Howard. "Nobody could have been there but Anna. They quarreled, and she seized that knife from the table. I have often shuddered at it, and have wondered how they could use such a murderous relic of oriental barbarity for a paper cutter."

"Where were you, Alice, when it happened?" asked one of the youngest girls, with a shudder.

"I was in my room," replied Miss Howard, "alone."

Overhearing this, President Norton was led to add another telegram to those which carried the dreadful news to the parents of the two girls. This last message was addressed to the most famous of living detectives, Nick Carter.

Norton College is not more than 100 miles from New York City. It is not far from the eastern bank of the Hudson, and may be reached from the metropolis in a few hours. The great detective would have gone far and sacrificed much to oblige the man who appealed to him in this

(*continued on page 74*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Newman Levy is one of those fortunate people of whom it can be said, "He leads a double life." Vocationally, he is a lawyer (formerly, an Assistant District Attorney of New York County) who has been counsel, sometimes for the prosecution, sometimes for the defense, in a hundred murder cases. Avocationally (at least, to begin with), he is a writer of light verse, author of the famous OPERA GUYED *and* THEATRE GUYED. *In his newest poem, Newman Levy has perhaps fused his double life — by putting a manhunter to meter.*

NICK CARTER

by NEWMAN LEVY

The years have flown rapidly by me
Since I was a youngster of ten,
But the sound of a name still awakens
The thrill of my boyhood again.

There was never a man like Nick Carter,
The idol and pride of my youth,
The terror of killers and robbers,
The peerless, unbeatable sleuth.

Perry Mason's a slick, tricky lawyer,
Old Poirot is fussy and vain,
Nero Wolfe is too fat and too lazy,
And I don't care for Mickey Spillane.

But Nick was as brave as a lion.
He'd the brawn and the muscle of ten,
And his eyes, flashing hypnotic power,
Could subdue the most desperate men.

Concealed in the folds of his garments
Were pistols of formidable size.
Also costumes, beards, wigs, and mustaches
If he needed a sudden disguise.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At times he'd appear as a sailor,
A scrubwoman, parson, or hick,
And so great was his skill as an actor
That you'd never suspect it was Nick.

He would enter the lair of his foemen
Without the least vestige of fear.
In his eyes was a cold, steely glitter;
On his face a contemptuous sneer.

But some rat would be sure to betray him
And they'd seize him and bind him with ropes,
Then they'd toss his limp form in the river,
And they'd think he was finished — the dopes!

Or perhaps they'd set fire to the building
Where he lay to a powder keg bound,
Or they'd dig a deep pit and they'd plant him
About fifty feet under the ground.

You might think that these stunts would disturb him,
But such trifles could never faze Nick,
For he knew he would quickly be rescued
By his faithful aides, Patsy and Chick.

For behold, there as chief of the bandits
Was Chick, in each hand a big gat,
And beside him, his loyal lieutenant
Stood grinning, Hibernian Pat.

Then swiftly they'd round up the scoundrels
And hustle them off to the pen,
And the world would exclaim in amazement,
"Nick Carter has done it again!"

No, there never was one like Nick Carter,
The idol and pride of my youth,
The terror of killers and robbers,
The peerless, unbeatable sleuth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*continued from page 71*)

emergency. Nick knew the venerable educator well, and admired him for his character and his attainments.

A special train carried Nick to the scene, and the sun had not yet risen when he entered Norton Hall.

"President Norton," he said, advancing to where the old man stood exchanging hurried words with Miss Austin, "I have come as speedily as a train could bring me. Shall I begin work at once?"

The president grasped Nick's hand.

"It is good of you to come," he said; "and now to work. The truth, the truth! and let me know it all as soon as possible."

Nick walked up the stairs and straight to the closed door of the room in which the tragedy had occurred, though there was nothing to distinguish that door from the others. It was locked and we waited for Mr. Norton to open it with his key.

"How did you know that this was the room?" exclaimed the old man, in surprise. "Did someone tell you?"

"I have spoken to no one. I marked the room as I came through the yard," responded Nick. "Please don't ask me any more questions now. I hope the room has not been disturbed."

"No more than was absolutely necessary. I gave orders that everything must be left as it was. But, of course, many persons had been in by the time I arrived."

"Now, Miss Austin," said Nick, turning to the teacher, "I would like to hear your story."

The facts are already known to the reader. Miss Austin was able to add nothing except that the corpse and the fainting girl were removed as speedily as possible to other rooms; that Miss Wilton had, apparently, regained consciousness, but that she seemed to be suffering from some disorder of the mind which prevented her from understanding the questions which were addressed to her. At last they had ceased to question her — a physician had so advised.

"And now," said Nick, "will you permit me to remain alone in this room for a little while?"

For an hour the great detective remained within, and what he did was known to no one. When he came out, his first request was that every person who had been in the room should be summoned before him.

The number included about twenty girls — most of whom had scarcely crossed the threshold — the two male instructors, a man-of-all-work from the president's house, Miss Austin, and the president himself.

Nick asked each one to describe exactly what he or she had done in the room. The answers were, as a rule, much clearer than might have been expected, and the detective expressed himself as perfectly satisfied with them.

"Now, if you please," he said to President Norton, "I would like to see Miss Wilton."

A few minutes later he stood beside her.

The girl lay with wide-open eyes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She had shed many tears, but was now quite calm, and there was certainly nothing in her appearance to indicate that she was not perfectly rational.

Only Miss Austin remained while the detective talked with her.

"Miss Wilton," said Nick, "will you tell me all you know about this affair?"

The girl muttered some incoherent words.

"Do not attempt to deceive me," the detective said kindly. "I know that you understand me perfectly, and can reply if you wish to. I also know the motive which prompts you to attempt this deception. Strange as it may seem to Miss Austin, and to others when they learn it, you desire to shield the murderer of your friend."

The girl covered her eyes with her hands, and the tears flowed through her fingers.

"Although there are many facts which seem to incriminate you," Nick continued, "I know that you are innocent. You were not in the room when the deed was committed, though you came in almost immediately afterward." Nick paused. "You had left the room secretly — that is, in such a way that no one but Miss Hyde knew of it. There is a way by which you can pass from the balcony in front of your window to the ground. I found your rope-ladder concealed under the loose board in the floor of the balcony."

Nick paused again, but Miss Wilton remained silent.

"You had gone out of the room in that secret manner. Why? From all the circumstances of the case, I infer that it was for the purpose of allowing somebody else to come in. However that may be, a man did enter that room. Of that I have absolute proof. He was a tall young man. I can judge his height very accurately, because I know by certain marks upon the wall exactly where his feet were when his hands grasped the balcony rail."

Still Miss Wilton said nothing. Nick went on calmly. "I will not tell you now how much more I know about this young man. Suffice it to say that I shall be able to identify him when I see him. He had several peculiarities which would distinguish him. For instance, his mustache was of a very light color, and unusually fine and silky. I should certainly know that mustache. . . . Now I am going over to Marlborough —"

Nick had named the town at a venture. It was about three miles from the college, and was the nearest place of any considerable size.

The instant he spoke the word he knew that the experimental shot had told. It was as sure as death that Anna Wilton knew that the man who had been in that room lived in Marlborough and might be found there by anyone who sought him.

She half-rose in the bed, uttered a cry, and fell back.

"I dare not go on," whispered Nick to Miss Austin. "She will faint."

The teacher beckoned him aside.

"How did you know all this?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"By a single hair," replied the detective.

"I cannot understand."

"Did you notice the little drinking glass standing by the pitcher on a table in the corner of the room?"

"Yes."

"A hair from a man's mustache was on the edge of that glass. The glass was not disturbed by anyone who had been in the room. None of the men in the school has a mustache, or is of the right complexion. There can be only one conclusion. I have ascertained that the glass was brought into the room early in the evening.

"As surely as I live this moment, a man drank from it within a very short time of the murder. It may be that he raised that glass to his lips within a few seconds after striking the fatal blow. I have known men so overcome with thirst after such a terrible crime as to put their heads into the halter for the sake of a swallow of cold water. Was it so with this man? I think it probable. At any rate, but for this tiny clue, this smallest particle of evidence, the great crime done in that room last night might never have been unraveled. But with this clue, this single hair" — Nick raised his voice a trifle here — "I will hunt down this villain, and bring him to his death, under the law."

The last words came to Anna Wilton's ears.

She raised herself suddenly in the bed.

"You are wrong, all wrong!" she exclaimed. "No man struck that blow! . . . Let me tell my story. It is true that a man visited Lottie in our room last evening. He has done so before."

"And you permitted this infamy?" exclaimed Miss Austin.

"There was no wrong. I knew the man, and his honor is so high and pure that even without my confidence in Lottie, I should have had no fear. He was denied the right to call on her in the usual way because he was poor. A rich man's son would have found no difficulty. In view of this fact, I consented to help them. The ladder was made, and he used to come in that way. He came several times last spring.

"I never saw him there. I could not bear it, for I — I loved him, and he had chosen her. Sometimes I remained in our bedroom. He was seldom with her longer than an hour. At other times, when the night was clear, I would descend the ladder before he came, and spend an hour in the grounds, under one of the big trees. It was so last night. From 8 till 9 I was outdoors. Then the clock struck and I returned.

"I climbed up the ladder, and then put it into its usual hiding place. It was at that moment Lottie screamed. For an instant I was dazed. Then, drawing aside the curtains, I looked into the room. Lottie lay dead on the floor.

"I saw her there, but I saw something else. The door of the room was softly closing. I could not see who closed it, for, of course, it hid the person from me. But I knew it must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be a jealous woman — one who had loved him as I have, but lacked the strength to bear it as I have done.

"She had surprised their secret, and had killed her rival."

The girl fell back upon the bed.

Miss Austin's eyes sought Nick's — but who can read that face?

"Let us leave her for a few minutes," said Nick, and he and Miss Austin went into another room.

Just as they did so, a physician entered.

"Miss Wilton, without meaning to, has furnished us with the name of that man," said the detective, as soon as they were alone.

"How?"

"By saying that he was refused permission to call on Miss Hyde in the usual manner. It can hardly happen that many men were thus refused, and at all events there can be but one with the right mustache."

"Mr. Carter," replied Miss Austin, "you have called attention to what seems to me one of the most surprising features of this mysterious affair."

"Please explain."

"No man has been so refused."

"Is that possible?"

"I am positive. I could not have failed to know of it. All such applications are referred to me. But we can ask President Norton."

They did so, and Miss Austin's statement was confirmed. No such refusal had ever been made.

"I cannot understand why Miss Wilton should have invented that story," said Miss Austin.

"Let us ask her," responded Nick.

They went toward her room. In the hall, near the door, they met the physician whom they had seen going in.

He was very much excited.

"What can have become of her?" he exclaimed. "She is gone!"

It was true. She had sent the doctor out of the room on some pretext, and had escaped from the building.

Nick succeeded in tracing her to one of the windows on the lower floor.

"I must follow," he called to Miss Austin. "I shall find her. Do not be alarmed."

The method by which Nick succeeded in following that faint trail need not be detailed. It will not surprise anyone who has any knowledge of his skill to be told that he did it easily.

And on the edge of the college grounds he found Miss Wilton.

She was almost concealed behind some shrubbery, and was leaning over a fence which ran beside the public road. She had hastily dressed herself, but there was little in her appearance to excite attention.

The road was much traveled, and many people passed while Nick watched her. Miss Wilton always drew back into the bushes and avoided being seen.

At last a little boy came along. She beckoned to him, and held out a note, and some small coins. At this moment Nick advanced to her side.

Before she was aware of his presence, he had possessed himself of the note.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was addressed to Mr. Arthur Morris. As the boy was obviously on his way to Marlborough, Nick had no doubt that Mr. Morris lived there.

He blew a whistle. It was a signal that had been agreed upon, and was promptly answered by two of the male instructors in the college. Nick gave Miss Wilton into their charge, and started on the road toward Marlborough.

As he walked he read the note and mused upon it. Thus it ran:

Dear Mr. Morris: You are in terrible danger. I have told a story which may shield you for a time. But if you are guilty — which at this moment I refuse to believe, though every fact tells me so — I pray you to hide yourself at the ends of the earth. There must be some excuse — let me believe that. I have looked upon you as all that a knight of romance could be. But whether you are what I thought you or a bloodstained murderer, I would still wish to save you. Believe, then, that there is one who pities and forgives you — who would do so even if the knife had been aimed at her own heart.

A. W.

"Well, that's a crazy note, if ever I saw one," muttered Nick. "At least, she is clear enough on the facts of the crime. Moreover, this note proves that her story about the closing door was a falsehood, invented to protect this man."

Nick had no trouble in finding the home of Arthur Morris. He lived with his parents, who were in moderate circumstances. Arthur was not at home. It was his mother who came to the door.

She called to somebody within the house, and asked where Arthur had gone.

"I heard him say that he was going to get shaved," replied a voice.

"Do you know where?" asked Nick. "I have an important note for him."

The location of the barber's shop was described. Nick easily found it.

Just as he reached the door he saw a tall young man entering. The detective started as his eye fell upon the long, light, and silky mustache. He had little doubt now of his man.

Nick entered the shop. No one was there but the barber, his assistant, and the customer who had not yet taken a chair. The assistant barber was examining some newspapers in a corner. His employer was also a newsdealer in a small way.

There was a little back shop, and by the exercise of great skill Nick managed to get the barber into it without exciting suspicion.

Then he exhibited his detective's badge to the assistant.

"Do just as I tell you," he said, "or you'll get into trouble."

The man was speechless, and almost incapable of motion. Nick backed him into a corner and took off the assistant's apron, collar, and tie. Then came one of those marvelous assumptions of a different character in which no man ever equaled Nick.

"Come along, Barlow!" called the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

waiting customer. "I'm in a hurry for a shave."

"Coming, sir," said Nick, imitating the barber's voice; and in a moment he stood behind the chair.

The man lay with his eyes closed. Nick performed the duties of a barber like one bred to it. The object of his attentions remained unconscious of the scrutiny to which he was being subjected.

"I heard a good story the other day," said Nick. "It was about a queer crime."

"Crime?" gasped the man. "What sort of crime?"

"Murder," said Nick cooly, trying the edge of the razor on his thumbnail.

"The funny part of it was that the evidence which convicted the man was furnished by a barber. It seems that the murderer left a hair of his mustache on the edge of a glass on the scene of the murder. The barber secured that hair and watched for the man. It was such a hair as this" — and Nick held out the one which he had actually taken from the tumbler.

"When the man came to be shaved, the barber pulled a hair out of his mustache, so!"

And Nick, with a sudden movement, drew a single hair from above the man's lip.

"Then," he continued, "the barber held them up and compared one with the other. Oh, it was a dead certainty. There could be no mistake. So he said: '*You are the murderer of Lottie Hyde!*'"

With a hoarse cry the young man leaped from his chair. There was no need to ask for confession. The face proclaimed the deed. And, in truth, it was a terrible ordeal. Who could have his guilt so thrust upon him and still be calm?

Nick laid down the razor.

With frenzied energy the young man seized it, and made a terrible sweep with the keen weapon.

But he was fighting against a superhuman strength and agility of which he knew nothing.

Nick's iron hand was on his wrist.

"And, now, Arthur Morris —" Nick began.

"Yes," said a pleasant voice behind him, "what can I do for you?"

Here was a surprise which was too much even for the great detective!

He turned and confronted another tall young man with a blond mustache, quite near in shade to the other, but neither so long nor so silky.

The real barber, astonished at what he heard, had come out of the rear shop.

"Who is this?" cried Nick, pointing to the man who had leaped out of the chair and was standing with the razor still in his hand.

"That's Carleton Perry," said the barber. "Everybody around here knows him."

The barber's tone implied that nobody around there knew any good of him.

"Well, Carleton Perry," said Nick, "I arrest you for the murder of Lottie Hyde."

"No, you don't, said Perry. "No-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body arrests me. I did it, and God knows I'm glad to get it off my mind. But this is how I do it, and avoid arrest at the same time."

With a fearful sweep of the arm he nearly severed his head from his body, and fell to the floor.

The explanation was simple enough, and Nick easily deduced it.

Perry, a reckless and dissipated fellow, had been in love with Lottie, and she with him. Indeed they had been married secretly, as the records afterward proved.

This was the previous year, when Lottie's father was a millionaire. His losses had come to Perry's ears, and he, loving the girl's money much more than the girl herself, had wished to be rid of her, especially as there was a rich young woman in the school who, he believed, could be won in Lottie's stead.

So much for the motive for the murderer. The opportunity was the best in the world.

Lottie had kept her love affair secret from her chum. Anna would never have allowed Perry, whose character was well known, to visit the room secretly. So Lottie had represented that her lover was Arthur Morris, for she knew how Anna worshiped him.

How well the mean and selfish plot worked we have seen. Perry, knowing how Anna had been deceived, was perfectly aware that his crime would be laid at Arthur's door and thus was confident in committing it.

Anna supposed that the man who called there so secretly was Arthur. She had believed the fiction told by Lottie that he had been refused the right of calling openly, because he was poor.

She had suffered in silence, like a loving woman, but her reward came. This terrible tragedy revealed the deception from which she had suffered.

The fact really was that Arthur loved her. In their infrequent meetings she had been cold to him, thinking that it was the part of honor to repress all sentiment for her friend's lover. All this is changed now, and out of evil has come good. The faithful little schoolgirl who showed such a noble heart under the cloud of a terrible suspicion has won the love she craved and is now happy beyond all her dreams.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Lamb to the Slaughter" is one of Roald Dahl's finest stories — surely one of the most cunningly conceived and most impudently written murder tales to have appeared in an American magazine for some time. That it was first published in "Harper's" does much credit both to the periodical and the author; that it was only one of more than half a dozen crime stories in Mr. Dahl's book, SOMEONE LIKE YOU, *goes far to explain why the Mystery Writers of America awarded their coveted "Edgar" to that book as the best volume of short stories published during 1953.*

LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

by ROALD DAHL

THE ROOM WAS WARM AND CLEAN, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight — hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The droop of the head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin — for this was her sixth month with child — had acquired a rather wonderful translucent quality; the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger, darker than before.

When the clock said ten minutes to 5, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

"Hullo, darling," she said.

"Hullo," he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a very weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other opposite, holding the tall glass with both his hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone.

Copyright, 1953, by Roald Dahl

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel — almost as a sunbather feels the sun — that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved the intent, far look in his eyes when they rested on her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

"Tired, darling?"

"Yes," he said. "I'm tired." And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it, left. She wasn't really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

"I'll get it!" she cried, jumping up.

"Sit down," he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

"Darling, shall I get your slippers?"

"No."

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

"I think it's a shame," she said, "that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long."

He didn't answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the glass.

"Darling," she said. "Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven't made any supper because it's Thursday."

"No," he said.

"If you're too tired to eat out," she went on, "it's still not too late. There's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair."

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

"Anyway," she went on, "I'll get you some cheese and crackers first."

"I don't want it," he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. "But you *must* have supper. I can easily do it here. I'd like to do it. We can have lamb chops. Or pork. Anything you want. Everything's in the freezer."

"Forget it," he said.

"But, darling, you *must* eat! I'll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like."

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

"Sit down," he said. "Just for a minute, sit down."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It wasn't till then that she began to get frightened.

"Go on," he said. "Sit down."

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

"Listen," he said. "I've got something to tell you."

"What is it, darling? What's the matter?"

He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near his left eye.

"This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I'm afraid," he said. "But I've thought about it a good deal, and I've decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won't blame me too much."

And he told her. It didn't take long, four or five minutes at most, and she sat very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went farther and farther away from her with each word.

"So there it is," he added. "And I know it's kind of a bad time to be telling you, but there simply wasn't any other way. Of course, I'll give you money and see you're looked after. But there needn't really be any fuss. I hope not, anyway. It wouldn't be very good for my job."

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn't even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn't been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

"I'll get the supper," she managed to whisper, and this time he didn't stop her.

When she walked across the room, she couldn't feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn't feel anything at all — except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now — down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the freezer, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper.

She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing by the window with his back to her.

"For God's sake," he said, hearing her, but not turning round, "don't make supper for me. I'm going out."

At that point Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him, and without any pause, she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of the shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while, blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself. So I've killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill them both — mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she wasn't going to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved it inside. Then she washed her hands, and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lips and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

"Hullo, Sam," she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar, too.

"I want some potatoes, please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't 6 o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

"Hullo, Sam," she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

"Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're *you*?"

"I want some potatoes, please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

"Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight," she told him. "We go out Thursdays, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house."

"Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?"

"No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer."

"Ah."

"I don't much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?"

"Personally," the grocer said, "I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?"

"Oh, yes, that'll be fine. Two of those."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Anything else?" The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. "How about afterward? What you going to give him for afterward?"

"Well — what would you suggest, Sam?"

The man glanced around his shop. "How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that."

"Perfect," she said. "He loves it."

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, "Thank you, Sam. Good night."

"Good night, Mrs. Maloney. And thank *you*."

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she'd become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn't *expecting* to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables: Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That's the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there'll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming to herself, and smiling.

"Patrick!" she called. "How are you, darling?"

She put the parcel down on the table, and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock.

All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She knew the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, "Quick! Come quick! Patrick's dead!"

"Who's speaking?"

"Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney."

"You mean Patrick Maloney's dead?"

"I think so," she sobbed. "He's lying on the floor and I think he's dead."

"Be right over," the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policemen walked in. She knew them both — she knew nearly all the men at that precinct — and she fell right into Jack Noonan's arms, weeping hysterically. He put her gently into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O'Malley, kneeling by the body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is he dead?" she cried.

"I'm afraid he is. What happened?"

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor.

While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley, who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she knew by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who knew about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven — "it's there now, cooking" — and how she'd slipped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

"Which grocer?" one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective, who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases — ". . . acted quite normal . . . very cheerful . . . wanted to give him a good supper . . . peas . . . cheesecake . . . impossible that she . . ."

After a while the photographer and the doctor departed, and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policemen. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully if she stayed just where she was until she felt better. She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said. She'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally, one of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke to her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand, he may've thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

"It's the old story," he said. "Get the weapon, and you've got the man."

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing — a big monkey wrench or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

"Or a big monkey wrench?"

She didn't think they had a big monkey wrench. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the yard all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw the flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly 9, she noticed by the clock on the mantel. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

"Jack," she said, the next time Sergeant Noonan went by, "would you mind giving me a drink?"

"Sure I'll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?"

"Yes, please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better."

He handed her the glass.

"Why don't you have one yourself," she said. "You must be awfully tired. Please do. You've been very good to me."

"Well," he answered. "It's not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going."

One by one, the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, came out quickly, and said, "Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside?"

"Oh *dear* me!" she cried. "So it is!"

"I better turn it off for you, hadn't I?"

"Will you do that, Jack? Thank you so much."

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark, tearful eyes. "Jack Noonan," she said.

"Yes?"

"Would you do me a small favor — you and these others?"

"We can try, Mrs. Maloney."

"Well," she said. "Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick's too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terribly hungry by now because it's long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don't you eat up that lamb that's in the oven? It'll be cooked just right by now."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Wouldn't dream of it," he said.

"Please," she begged. "Please eat it. Personally I couldn't touch a thing, certainly not what's been in the house when he was here. But it's all right for you. It'd be a favor to me if you'd eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterward."

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end she was able to persuade them to go into the kitchen and help themselves.

The woman stayed where she was, listening to them through the open door, and she could hear them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

"Have some more, Charlie?"

"No. Better not finish it."

"She *wants* us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favor."

"Okay, then. Give me some more."

"That's a hell of a big club the guy must've used to hit poor Patrick," one of them was saying. "The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledge hammer."

"That's why it ought to be easy to find."

"Exactly what I say."

"Whoever done it, they're not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need."

One of them belched.

"Personally, I think it's right here on the premises."

"Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?"

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A strange adventure involving a doctor, a nurse, an Australian, a bald-headed lawyer, and the heiress to an estate of thirty million pounds . . . an "unknown" story by the author of THE OLD WIVES' TALE *and* CLAYHANGER *— the shrewd and theatrical writer of whom it has been said: "When the Twentieth Century is over, Arnold Bennett will be somewhere near the top of its list of novelists . . ."*

MIDNIGHT AT THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL

by ARNOLD BENNETT

WELL, SAID THE DOCTOR, YOU say I've been very secretive lately. Perhaps I have. However, I don't mind telling you — just you fellows — the whole history of the affair that has preoccupied me. I shan't assert that it's the most curious case in all my experience. My experience has been pretty varied, and pretty lively, as you know, and cases are curious in such different ways. Still, a poisoning business is always a bit curious, and this one was extremely so.

It isn't often that a person who means to commit murder by poison calls in a physician to assist him and deliberately uses the unconscious medico as his tool. Yet that is exactly what happened.

It isn't often that a poisoner contrives to hit on a poison which is at once original, almost untraceable, and to be obtained from any chemist without a doctor's prescription. Yet that, too, is exactly what happened.

I can assure you that the entire episode was a lesson to me. It opened my eyes to the possibilities which lie ready to the hand of a really intelligent murderer in this Twentieth Century. People talk about the masterpieces of poisoning in the Middle Ages. Pooh! Second-rate! They didn't know enough in the Middle Ages to achieve anything which a modern poisoner with genius would deem first rate; they simply didn't know enough.

Another point in the matter which forcibly struck me was the singular usefulness of a big London hotel to a talented criminal. You can do precisely what you please in a big hotel, and nobody takes the least notice. You wander in, you wander out, and who cares? You are only an item in a crowd. And when you have reached the upper corridors you are as lost to pursuit as a needle in a haystack.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You may take two rooms, one after the other, in different names, and in different parts of the hotel; the servants and officials will be none the wiser, because the second floor knows not the third, nor the third the fourth; you may oscillate between those two rooms in a manner to puzzle the Commissioner of Scotland Yard himself. And you are just as secure in your apartments as a medieval baron in his castle — yes, and more.

On that night there were over a thousand guests in the Grand Babylon Hotel (there was a ball in the Gold Rooms, and a couple of banquets); and in the midst of all that diverse humanity, unperceived, unsuspected, a poignant and terrible drama was going on, and things so occurred that I tumbled right into it. Well, I'll tell you . . .

I was called in to the Grand Babylon about 9:00 P.M.; suite Number 63, second floor. The outer door of the suite was opened for me by a well-dressed woman of thirty or so, slim, with a face expressive and intelligent rather than handsome. I liked her face — I was attracted by its look of honesty and alert good-nature.

"Good evening, Doctor," she said. She had a charming low voice, as she led me into a highly luxurious drawing-room. "My name is Russell, and I wish you to see a young friend of mine who is not well." She hesitated and turned to an old bald-headed man, who stood looking out of the window at the twilight panorama of the Thames. "My friend's solicitor, Mr. Dancer," she explained. We bowed, Mr. Dancer and I.

"Nothing serious, I hope," I remarked.

"No, no!" said Miss Russell.

Nevertheless, she seemed to me to be extremely nervous and anxious; as she preceded me into the bedroom, a chamber quite as magnificent as the drawing-room.

On the bed lay a beautiful young girl. Yes, you may laugh, you fellows, but she was genuinely beautiful. She smiled faintly as we entered. Her features had an ashy tint, and tiny drops of cold perspiration stood on her forehead. However, she certainly wasn't very ill — I could see that in a moment, and I fixed my conversational tone accordingly.

"Do you feel as if you could breathe freely, but that if you did it would kill you?" I inquired, after I had examined her. And she nodded; smiling again. Miss Russell also smiled, evidently pleased that I had diagnosed the case so quickly.

My patient was suffering from a mild attack of pseudo-angina, nothing worse. Not angina pectoris, you know — that's usually associated with old age. Pseudo-angina is a different thing. With a weak heart, it may be caused by indigestion. The symptoms are cardiac spasms, acute pain in the chest, a strong inclination to make even the smallest movement, and a state of mental depression, together with that queer fancy about breathing. The girl had these symptoms, and she also had a headache and a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dicrotism of the pulse — two pulsations instead of one, not unusual. I found that she had been eating a too hearty dinner, and that she had suffered from several similar attacks in the immediate past.

"You had a doctor in before?" I asked.

"Yes," said Miss Russell. "But he was unable to come tonight, and as your house is so near we sent for you."

"There is no danger whatever — no real cause for anxiety," I summed up. "I will have some medicine made up instantly."

"Trinitrin?" demanded Miss Russell.

"Yes," I answered, a little astonished at this readiness. "Your regular physician prescribed it?"

(I should explain to you that trinitrin is nothing but nitroglycerine in a non-explosive form.)

"I think it was trinitrin," Miss Russell replied, with an appearance of doubtfulness. "Perhaps you will write the prescription and I will dispatch a messenger at once. I should be obliged, Doctor, if you would remain with us until — if you would remain with us."

"Decidedly!" I said. "I will remain with pleasure. But do accept my assurance," I added, gazing at her face, so anxious and apprehensive, "that there is no cause for alarm."

She smiled and concurred. But I could see that I had not convinced her. And I began to suspect that she was not after all so intelligent as I had imagined. My patient, who was not now in any pain, lay calmly, with closed eyes.

Now, do not forget the old bald-headed lawyer in the drawing-room.

"I suppose you are often summoned to the Grand Babylon, sir, living, as you do, just round the corner," he remarked to me somewhat pompously. He had a big nose and a habit of staring at you over his eyeglasses with his mouth wide open, after having spoken. We were now alone together in the drawing-room. I was waiting for the arrival of the medicine, and he was waiting for — I didn't know what he was waiting for.

"Occasionally. Not often," I responded. "I am called more frequently to the Majestic, over the way."

"Ah, just so, just so," he murmured.

I could see that he meant to be polite in his high and dry antique legal style; and I could see also that he was very bored in that hotel drawing-room. So I proceeded to explain the case to him, and to question him discreetly about my patient and Miss Russell.

"You are, of course, aware sir, that the young lady is Miss Spanton, Miss Adelaide Spanton?" he said.

"What? Not 'the' Spanton?"

"Precisely, sir. The daughter of Edgar Spanton, my late client, the newspaper proprietor."

"And this Miss Russell?"

"Miss Russell was formerly Miss Adelaide's governess. She is now her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

friend, and profoundly attached to the young lady; a disinterested attachment, so far as I can judge, though naturally many people will think otherwise. Miss Adelaide is of a very shy and retiring disposition; she has no other friends, and she has no near relatives. Save for Miss Russell she is, sir, if I may so phrase it, alone in the world."

"But Miss Spanton is surely very wealthy?"

"You come to the point, sir. If my young client reaches her twenty-first birthday she will be the absolute mistress of the whole of her father's fortune. You may have noticed in the public press that I swore his estate at more than thirty millions."

"And how far is Miss Spanton from her twenty-first birthday?" I asked.

The old lawyer glanced at his watch.

"Something less than three hours. At midnight she will have legally entered her twenty-second year."

"I see," I said. "Now I can understand Miss Russell's anxiety, which refuses to be relieved even by my positive assurance. No doubt Miss Russell has worked herself up into a highly nervous condition. And may I inquire what will happen — I mean, what would have happened if Miss Spanton had not reached her majority?"

"The entire estate would have passed to a cousin, a Mr. Samuel Grist, of Melbourne. I daresay you know the name. Mr. Grist is understood to be the leading theatrical manager in Australia. Speaking as one professional man to another, sir, I may venture to remark that Mr. Grist's reputation is more than a little doubtful — you may have heard — many transactions and adventures. Ha, ha! Still, he is my late client's sole surviving relative, except Miss Adelaide. I have never had the pleasure of meeting him; he confines himself exclusively to Australia."

"This night, then," I laughed, "will see the end of any hopes which Mr. Grist may have entertained."

"Exactly, sir," the lawyer agreed. "It will also see the end of Miss Russell's immediate anxieties. Upon my word, since Mr. Spanton's regrettable death, she has been both father and mother to my lonely young client. A practical woman, sir, Miss Russell! And the excessiveness of her apprehensions, if I may so phrase it, must be excused. She has begged me to remain here till midnight, in order that I may witness to Miss Spanton's — er — vitality, and also in order to obtain Miss Spanton's signature to certain necessary documents. I should not be surprised, sir, if she requested you also to remain. She is not a woman to omit precautions."

"I'm afraid I can't wait till 12," I said. The conversation ceased, and I fell into meditation.

I do not mind admitting that I was deeply impressed by what I will call the romantic quality of the situation. I thought of old Spanton, who had begun with something less than

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing and died virtually the owner of three daily papers and many weeklies and monthlies. I thought of Spanton's, Ltd., and their colossal offices spreading half round Salisbury Square.

Why, I even had a copy of the extra special edition of the *Evening Gazette* in my pocket! Do any of you fellows remember Spanton starting the *Evening Gazette*? He sold three hundred thousand the first day. And now old Spanton was dead — you know he died of drink, and there was nothing left of the Spanton blood except this girl lying there on the bed, and the man in Australia. And all the Spanton editors, and the Spanton subeditors, and Spanton artists, and the Spanton reporters and compositors, and the Spanton rotary presses, and the Spanton paper mills, and the Spanton cyclists, were slaving and toiling to put a hundred thousand a year into this girl's purse. And there she was, feeble and depressed, and solitary, except for Miss Russell, and the man in Australia perhaps hoping she would die; and there was Miss Russell, worrying and fussing and apprehending and fearing. And the entire hotel oblivious of the romantic, I could almost say the pathetic, situation. And then I thought of Miss Spanton's future, burdened with those thirty millions, and I wondered if those thirty millions would buy her happiness.

"Here is the medicine, Doctor," said Miss Russell, entering the drawing-room hurriedly, and handing me the bottle with the chemist's label on it. I went with her into the bedroom. The beautiful Adelaide Spanton was already better, and she admitted as much when I administered the medicine — two minims of a 1 per cent solution of trinitrin, otherwise nitroglycerine, the usual remedy for pseudo-angina.

Miss Russell took the bottle from my hand, corked it, and placed it on the dressing-table. Shortly afterwards I left the hotel. The lawyer had been right in supposing that Miss Russell would ask me to stay, but I was unable to do so. I promised, however, to return in an hour, all the while insisting that there was not the slightest danger for the patient.

It was 10:30 when I came back.

"Second floor," I said carelessly to the lift-boy, and he whirled me upwards; the Grand Babylon lifts travel very fast.

"Here you are, sir," he murmured respectfully, and I stepped out.

"Is this the second floor?" I asked suddenly.

"Beg pardon! I thought you said seventh, sir."

"It's time you were in bed, my lad!" was my retort, and I was just re-entering the lift when I caught sight of Miss Russell in the corridor. I called to her thinking she would perhaps descend with me, but she did not hear, and so I followed her down the corridor, wondering what her business was on the seventh floor. She opened a door and disappeared into a room.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well?" I heard a voice exclaim inside the room, and then the door was pushed to; it was not latched.

"I did say seventh!" I called to the lift-boy, and he vanished with his machine.

The voice inside the room had startled me. It gave me furiously to think, as the French say. With a sort of instinctive unpremeditated action I pressed gently against the door until it stood ajar about an inch. And I listened.

"It's a confounded mysterious case to me, "the voice was saying," that that dose the other day didn't finish her. We're running it a dashed sight too close! Here, take this — it's all ready, label and everything. Substitute the bottles. I'll run no risks this time. One dose will do the trick inside half an hour, and on that I'll bet my boots!"

"Very well," said Miss Russell, quite calmly. "It's pure trinitrin, is it?"

"You're the coolest customer I ever struck!" the voice exclaimed, in an admiring tone. "Yes, it's pure trinitrin — beautiful, convenient stuff! Looks like water, no taste, very little smell, and so volatile that all the doctors on the Medical Council couldn't trace it at a post-mortem. Besides, the doctor prescribed a solution of trinitrin, and you got it from the chemist, and in case there's a rumpus we can shove the mistake onto the chemist's dispenser, and fine old row he'll get into. By the way, what's the new doctor like?"

"Oh, so-so!" said Miss Russell, in her even tones.

"It's a good thing on the whole, perhaps, that I arranged that carriage accident for the first one," the voice remarked. "One never knows. Get along now, and don't look so anxious. Your face belies your voice. Give me a kiss!"

"Tomorrow," said Miss Russell.

I hurried away, overwhelmed with horror and amazement, and turning a corner so as to avoid discovery, reached the second floor by the staircase. I did not wish to meet Miss Russell in the lift.

My first thought was not one of alarm for Adelaide Spanton — of course, I knew I could prevent the murder — but of profound sorrow that Miss Russell should have proved to be a woman so unspeakably wicked. I swore never to trust a woman's face again. I had liked her face. Then I dwelt on the chance, the mere chance, of my careless pronunciation, a lift-boy's error, which had saved the life of the poor millionaire girl. And lastly I marveled at the combined simplicity and ingenuity of the plot. The scoundrel upstairs — probably Samuel Grist himself — had taken the cleverest advantage of Miss Spanton's tendency to pseudo-angina. What could be more clever than to poison with the physician's own medicine? Very probably the girl's present attack had been induced by an artful appeal to her appetite; young women afflicted as she was are frequently just a little greedy. And I perceived that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the villain was correct in assuming that nitroglycerine would never be traced at a post-mortem save in the smallest possible quantity — just such a quantity as I had myself prescribed. He was also right in his assumption that the pure drug would infallibly kill in half an hour.

I pulled myself together, and having surreptitiously watched Miss Russell into suite Number 63, I followed her. When I arrived at the bedroom she was pouring medicine from a bottle; a maid stood at the foot of the bed.

"I am just giving the second dose," said Miss Russell easily to me.

"What a nerve!" I said to myself, and aloud: "By all means!"

She measured the dose, and approached the bed without a tremor. Adelaide Spanton opened her mouth.

"Stop!" I cried out. "We'll delay that dose for half an hour. Kindly give me the glass." I took the glass from Miss Russell's passive fingers. "And I would like to have a word with you now, Miss Russell!" I added.

The maid went swiftly from the room.

The old bald-headed lawyer had gone down to the hotel smoking-saloon for a little diversion, and we faced each other in the drawing-room — Miss Russell and I. The glass was still in my hand.

"And the new doctor is so-so, eh?" I remarked.

"What do you mean?"

"I think you know what I mean," I retorted. "I need only tell you that by a sheer chance I stumbled upon your atrocious plot — the plot of that scoundrel upstairs. All you had to do was to exchange the bottles, and administer pure trinitrin instead of my prescribed solution of it, and Miss Spanton would be dead in half an hour. The thirty millions would go to the Australian cousin, and you would doubtless have your reward — say, a cool hundred thousand, or perhaps marriage. And you were about to give the poison when I stopped you."

"I was not!" she cried. And she fell into a chair, and hid her face in her hands, and then looked towards the bedroom.

"Miss Spanton is in no danger," I said. "She will be quite well tomorrow. So you were not going to give the poison, after all?" I laughed.

"I beg you to listen, Doctor," she said at length, standing up. "I am in a most embarrassing position. Nevertheless, I think I can convince you that your suspicions against me are unfounded."

I laughed again. But secretly I admired her for acting the part so well.

"The man upstairs," she went on, "is Samuel Grist, supposed to be in Australia. It is four months ago since I, who am Adelaide Spanton's sole friend, discovered that he was scheming her death. The skill of his methods appalled me. There was nothing to put before the police, and yet I had a horrible fear of the worst. I felt that he would stop at nothing —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absolutely nothing. I felt that, if we ran away, he would follow us. I had a presentiment that he would infallibly succeed, and I was haunted by it day and night. Then an idea occurred to me — I would pretend to be his accomplice. And I saw suddenly that that was the surest way, the only way, of defeating him. I approached him and he accepted the bait. I carried out all his instructions, except the fatal instructions. It is by his orders, and for his purposes, that we are staying in this hotel. Heavens! To make certain of saving my darling Adelaide, I have even gone through the farce of promising to marry him!"

"And do you seriously expect me to believe this?" I asked coldly.

"Should I have had the solicitor here," she demanded, "if I had really meant — meant to —"

She sobbed momentarily, and then regained control of herself.

"I don't know," I said, "but it occurs to me that the brain capable of deliberately arranging a murder to take place in the presence of the doctor might have some hidden purpose in securing also the presence of the solicitor."

"Mr. Grist is unaware that the solicitor is here. He has been informed that Mr. Dancer is my uncle, and favorable to the — to the —" she stopped, apparently overcome.

"And you did not mean to administer this poison?" I pursued, "I suppose you meant to withdraw the glass at the last instant?"

"It is not poison," she replied.

"Not poison?"

"No. I did not exchange the bottles. I only pretended to."

"There seems to have been a good deal of pretending," I observed. "By the way, may I ask why you were giving this, whether it is poison or not, to my patient? I do not recollect that I ordered a second dose."

"For the same reason that I pretended to change the bottle. For the benefit of the maid whom we saw just now in the bedroom."

"And why for the benefit of the maid?"

"Because I found out this morning that she is in the pay of Grist. That discovery accounts for my nervousness tonight about Adelaide. By this time the maid has probably told Mr. Grist what has taken place, and, and — I shall rely on your help if anything should happen, Doctor. Surely, *surely*, you believe me?"

"I regret to say, madam," I answered, "that I find myself unable to believe you at present. But there is a simple way of giving credence to your story. You say that you did not exchange the bottles. This liquid, then, is the medicine prescribed by me, and it is harmless. Oblige me by drinking it."

And I held the glass towards her.

She took it.

"Fool!" I said to myself, as soon as her fingers had grasped it. "She will drop it on the floor, and an invaluable piece of evidence will be destroyed."

But she did not drop it on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

floor. She drank it at one gulp, looked me in the eyes, and murmured, "Now do you believe me?"

"Yes," I said. And I did.

At the same moment her face changed color and she sank to the ground. "What have I drunk?" she moaned. The glass rolled on the carpet, unbroken.

Miss Russell had, in fact, drunk a full dose of pure trinitrin. I recognized the symptoms at once. I rang for assistance. I got a stomach pump. I got ice, and sent for ergot and for atropine. I despaired of saving her; but I did save her after four injections. I need not describe to you all the details. Let it suffice that she recovered.

"Then you did exchange the bottles?" I could not help putting this question to her as soon as she was in a fit state to hear it.

"I swear to you that I had not meant to," she whispered. "In my nervousness I must have confused them. You have saved Adelaide's life."

"I have saved yours, anyway," I said.

"But you believe me?"

"Yes," I said; and the curious thing is that I did believe her. I was convinced, and I am convinced, that she did not mean to exchange the bottles.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. We could hear Big Ben striking 12.

"Midnight," I said.

She clutched my hand with a swift movement. "Go and see that my Adelaide lives," she cried almost hysterically.

I opened the door between the two rooms and went into the sleeping chamber.

"Miss Spanton is dozing quietly," I said, on my return.

"Thank God!" Miss Russell murmured. And then old bald-headed Mr. Dancer came into the room, blandly unconscious of all that had passed during his sojourn in the smoking-saloon.

When I left the precincts of the Grand Babylon at one o'clock, the guests were beginning to leave the Gold Rooms, and the great courtyard was a scene of flashing lights, and champing horses, and pretty laughing women.

"What a queer place a hotel is!" I thought.

Neither Mr. Grist nor the mysterious maid was seen again in London. Possibly they consoled each other. The beautiful Adelaide Spanton — under my care, ahem! — is completely restored to health.

Yes, I am going to marry her. No, not the beautiful Adelaide, you duffers — besides, she is too young for my middle age — but Miss Russell. Her Christian name is Ethel. As for the beautiful Adelaide, there is now a viscount in the case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Anthony Boucher has experimented successfully with nearly every type of writing, and surely with every length. He has written the full-length novel (say, 60,000 words and over), the novella or novelette (say, 20,000 to 25,000 words), the short story (5,000 to 10,000 words), and the so-called short-short (1500 to 2500 words). Then one day Mr. Boucher happened to hear us say: We wonder what kind of crime story could be written in about 500 words . . . and Tony promptly accepted the challenge. Here it is, surprisingly full-bodied, in slightly less than 600 words — what might be called the short short-short — and surprisingly subtle too.

A MATTER OF SCHOLARSHIP

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

No scholar can pretend to absolute completeness, but every scholarly work must be as nearly complete as possible; any omission of available data because of carelessness, inadequate research, or (most damning of all) personal motives — such as the support of a theory which the data might contradict — is the blackest sin against scholarship itself . . .

Such were my thoughts as I sat working on my definitive MURDEROUS TENDENCIES IN THE ABNORMALLY GIFTED: A STUDY OF THE HOMICIDES COMMITTED BY ARTISTS AND SCHOLARS. The date was October 21, 1951. The place was my office in Wortley Hall on the campus of the University.

My conclusions seemed unassailable: Murder had been committed by eminent scholars (one need only allude to Professor Webster of Harvard) and by admirable artists (François Villon leaps first to the mind). But in no case had the motivation been connected with the abnormal gift; my study of the relationship between homicidal tendencies and unusual endowments established, in the best scholarly tradition, that no such relationship existed.

It was then that Stuart Danvers entered my office. "Professor Jordan?" he asked. His speech was blurred and he swayed slightly. "I read your piece in the *Atlantic* on Villon [it sounded like *villain*] and I said to myself, 'There's the guy to help you.' " And before I could speak he had placed a large typewritten manuscript on my desk. "Understand," he went on, "I'm no novice at this. I'm a pro. I've sold fact-crime pieces to all the top editors." He hiccuped. "Only now it strikes me it's time for a little hard-cover prestige."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I stared at the title page, which read GENIUS IN GORE, and then began flipping through the book. The theme was my own. The style was lurid, the documentation inadequate. He had taken seriously the pretensions to learning of such frauds as Aram and Rulloff; he had omitted such a key figure as the composer Gesualdo da Venosa. But I had read enough in the field to know that his abominable work was what is called "commercial." He would have no trouble in finding a publisher immediately; and my own book was scheduled by the University Press for, at best, "some time" in 1953.

"Little nip?" he suggested, and as I shook my head he drank from his flask. "Like it? Thought maybe you could help — well, sort of goose it with a couple of footnotes . . . *you* know."

I looked at this drunken, unscholarly lout. I saw myself eclipsed in his shadow, the merest epigone to his attack upon my chosen Thebes. And then he said, "Of course that's just a rough first draft, you understand."

"Do you keep a carbon of first drafts?" I asked idly. And when he shook his addled skull, I split that skull's forehead with my heavy paperweight. He stumbled back against the wall, lurched forward, and then collapsed. His head struck the desk. I tucked his obscene manuscript away, wrapped the paperweight in a handkerchief, carried it down the hall, washed it, flushed the handkerchief down the toilet, returned to my room, and called the police. A stranger had wandered into my office drunk, stumbled, and cracked his head against my desk.

The crime, if such it can be considered, was as nearly perfect as any of which I have knowledge. It is also unique in being the only instance of a crime committed by an eminent scholar which was *motivated* by his scholarship . . .

[*Excerpt from* MURDEROUS TENDENCIES IN THE ABNORMALLY GIFTED (*University Press, 1953*), *State's Exhibit A in the trial for murder of the late Professor Rodney Jordan.*]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Big-city Manhunt — ruthless and realistic — in the* Black Mask *manner

THE DIMINISHING CIRCLE

by WILLIAM HOLDER

FESLER TRACED AIMLESS PATTERNS on Nick's bar with his glass. He was tired to the bone, and he needed a bath and a shave and about twenty hours of sleep. He had been on the case for 36 hours straight and he hadn't come up with a thing. Not a thing.

Tom wiped the bar and said, "Marola was a good friend of yours, wasn't he, Dan?"

Fesler nodded. "I knew him most of my life."

"It was tough, the way he got it," Tom said. "I hear he didn't have a chance."

"He should have expected it," someone said, and Fesler turned slightly and saw that it was Kelly. Joe Kelly, big, well-dressed, with his handsome ruddy face, the marks of good living on him. "He was a smart cop," Kelly said. "Sooner or later, he was going to get it like that."

Fesler's anger and disgust had been directed at his own futility and now he was glad of another target. He said, "You have the wrong slant on Marola. Your kid brother was wanted for a loft job, and Marola spotted him and collared him. It was the second time he'd been caught off base and he got fifteen. If the watchman had died, it would have been worse."

Kelly said nothing, and Fesler's anger and fatigue prompted his tongue. "Marola wasn't 'smart.' He was offered five thousand to forget he'd ever seen your brother. He passed it up, but he didn't mention it in court. Now me, I would have talked about that. But not Marola. He wasn't 'smart' or tough. He figured the kid's rap would be hard enough without a bribery charge on top of it. He never spoke about it to anyone but me. But I'd have slapped that on him, too."

Kelly looked at him for a long moment. "You wouldn't have had the nerve to lock Tommy up. You wouldn't have held onto him for two minutes. He was too tough for you. You cops are all alike. You're either big and dumb and tough or you're smart and not big enough. I never saw a really good one."

Fesler's eyes were on the bar and he said to himself, *It could have been Kelly. It could easily have been Kelly.* He put a bill on the bar and said, "I'll see you, Tom." He went out into the street and took a cab. The driver had to wake him when they reached the apartment house in which he lived.

Copyright, 1948, by Popular Publications, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His wife was in the living room, reading a paper, and when she looked up at him questioningly, he noticed that her eyes were red-rimmed. He shook his head and said, "Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

The shower and the shave made him feel more like a human being. In the kitchen there was a place set for him. He sat down and said, "It looks good, kid."

His wife said, then, "Dan, when are you going to quit? When are you going to give it up?"

He looked at her, felt the weariness again. He said, "Now Mary, we've talked about this before, and . . ."

He recognized the touch of hysteria in her voice. "I tell you, Dan, I can't stand it any longer! Eight years of not knowing whether you're going to walk into the house or be carried in. Eight miserable, uncertain years. You're always working on something, or you're spending the day in court. I never have a chance to relax, because the fear is always there, in back of everything."

He poured his coffee and said nothing.

Mary's hands were on the table now. She bent toward him and her voice was high. "Andy was a cop for eight years. Eight years. And now Tess Marola is right there down the hall, with her two kids, and the casket is laid out in the living room. And tomorrow Andy will get an inspector's funeral. That'll do her a lot of good, won't it? An inspector's funeral."

He put his head in his hands and said, "I'm tired, Mary," and heard her walk into the living room. He looked at the things on the table for a moment, but his appetite was gone. He went into the bedroom and was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

Mary was shaking him awake. He came out of it slowly and she said, "The phone. Someone wants to talk to you."

He looked at the clock on the night table and it was midnight. He'd slept for four hours. He took the phone. It was Reagan, a detective at the precinct house that Marola had worked out of. They had the guy who'd shot Marola, had him cold, and they were talking to him now. Did Fesler want to come down and look him over?

Fesler said he'd be there in half an hour.

On the way downtown he went over it again. Andy Marola had been walking a beat on the midnight to 8 shift. At 5:20 A.M., two days ago, he had called from a box on the corner of Forty-Ninth and Third. He told the precinct house that the window of a jewelry shop on the block had been broken and the window cleaned of its cheap contents. Eight minutes later a squad car had arrived, and the two men in it had found Andy halfway up the block. He was dead. He had been shot three times through the chest and was lying near the curb. His gun was in its holster and there was no indication that he'd tried to get at it.

That was all. The street was de-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

serted, no one had heard the shots, no one had seen anything. The inspector had told Fesler, "I know he was a friend of yours. Work on it. You've got the whole Department to call on. Take a month. Take a year. But I want whoever did this."

And so far Fesler had found nothing. He knew that Andy had been shot from close up with a .38. That was all. Not another thing. A passing El train overhead would muffle the sound of shots, and there aren't many people out at that hour of the morning. Fesler had men working from house to house, door to door, but they hadn't uncovered a thing so far. This was the first break in the case, and Fesler hoped with all his weary soul that the thing would be clean and uncomplicated. He was sick to death of blind alleys . . .

At the precinct house they had their man in a small room. There was a heavy light on him, and Fesler saw that they had been working him over. He was a skinny, scared kid, about nineteen, with a bad case of acne and eyes filled with trouble and fright. Reagan told Fesler all about it. They had caught the kid in a hock shop, trying to pawn a watch that had been stolen from the smashed jewelry store window. It was the third shop he had visited, and the cheap watches were a trail behind him.

He had said, okay, he had broken the window and stolen the watches. He was sick and out of a job and it had looked like a few easy dollars. But he hadn't shot any cop. He didn't even know that a cop had been shot.

Fesler studied him, and said, "He didn't do it."

Reagan was angry. "The hell he didn't! He breaks the window and Marola spots him, and this punk blames him."

Fesler said, "You've got it wrong. The kid breaks the window, takes the watches, and runs. Marola comes along a little later and sees the window and makes his call to the house. He hasn't got the kid, or he would have said so. Is the kid going to hang around the neighborhood after he cleans the window? Why should he? Take a look at him. He wouldn't shoot ducks in a gallery."

Reagan said, "This is your cookie."

Fesler shook his head. "It doesn't tie up. You can work on that kid for six days, but you've got the wrong one." He knew he was correct, and it bothered him, for he had been hoping this would be the break.

He walked to an open restaurant and ordered bacon and eggs and coffee, and mentally he jotted down the names of men who had reason to hate Marola enough to kill him.

There weren't many, for the simple reason that Marola had been a good and honest man. The course of his work had been unspectacular except for one or two occasions. He had shot a gunman in a liquor store stick-up, but that man was still up the river and he would be for another five years. He had mauled Tough Georgie Mink a month ago, when that shady big-timer had threatened to have Marola

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

busted off the force for giving him a parking ticket. Mink could be a guy who might carry a grudge that far.

And then there was the Kelly kid. Fifteen years was a long time, and Big Joe Kelly had hired a battery of lawyers who hadn't been able to do a thing. It was he, too, who had offered Marola the five thousand, a fact which could never be proved, now.

He got moving. He found Georgie Mink in his usual spot, a good bar just off Broadway, still carrying a fresh scar over his eye from Marola's licking.

Mink told his story, and in a few minutes Fesler called Homicide and they sent a man out to check it. Then he looked for Kelly.

He found him again in Nick's. The man looked even more powerful and affluent than he had earlier in the evening, and Fesler knew a heavy moment of doubt within himself and wondered if he had the strength, the energy, to go against this man with nothing at all but an inner whisper of suspicion. He said to Kelly, "Let's sit in a booth. There are a couple of things I want to talk to you about."

The bar was uncrowded. Kelly did not move. He said, "I like it here."

Fesler said, "All right. Where were you the night Marola was shot?" The question sounded weak and naked.

Kelly looked at him. "What are you trying to do, Fesler?"

"I asked you a question."

"You can ask all you want. The hell with you."

"I can take you down to the house and ask. You're not so big in this town. I've seen tougher guys answer questions."

Kelly looked at him, and his voice was crowded with restrained anger. He said, "Ten thousand of you. Ten thousand of you to ask a guy a question and get any answer you want."

"You know that isn't the way it works," Fesler said. "It's just that you can save yourself a lot of trouble. Where were you that night?"

"I was playing cards," Kelly said. "And you can try to do something with that. Patsy Boyle, Little Archie, Johnny Eastside, and me. At the Blane. Room 1404."

Fesler nodded. "That's all I wanted to know. Simple, wasn't it?"

"Check it," Kelly said. "Check it until you're tired."

Fesler said, "Sure." He moved up the bar and had a drink and thought of Kelly. The man was clever as well as hostile. He had a big garage over on the West Side, Fesler knew. He had a car lot and he had a trucking business. He was sitting on top of the world. He was fresh with the strength of prosperity, untired and unused.

Standing there, he knew that Kelly was capable of doing this thing. He lived in a world of money and the power of money, and Marola's refusal to accept the five thousand had probably seemed a deliberate and malicious insult.

But he was talking to himself, now, going along on nothing. He went to the phone booth and made a call and told them to check with the men

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kelly had named, and with the people at the Blane Hotel.

He came out of the booth and Kelly said, "So you're really checking those guys and the hotel."

Fesler said, "That's right." He felt very uninspired.

"You're stupid," Kelly said. "You have a cop's mind. You think I'd tell you something and not expect you to check it?" He finished his drink. He said, "Ten thousand flatfooted slobs like yourself to send one punk kid like my brother to jail." He went out.

Fesler looked at the clock. It was half-past 3. He made another call and asked that a couple of men meet him at the corner of Third and Forty-Ninth at a quarter of 5. He took his time with a second drink, then went uptown.

The two men were on time, and he told them what he wanted. They were just to walk around the neighborhood and talk to anyone who was out at this hour. People coming home from night jobs, other people going out to early ones. Anyone who might have been in the vicinity the morning Marola was killed and who might have noticed something unusual.

He found the milkman himself, two blocks away. The immaculate wagon and the patient horse stood outside an apartment house, and Fesler waited for the driver. The man came out of the building with his metal racks filled with empty bottles, and Fesler flashed his badge and asked his questions. The man was young, in his thirties, and he lit a cigarette.

He suddenly pointed his finger at Fesler and said, "Yeah. That morning. Half-past 5, give or take five minutes. It was dark and I'd just come out of a house. This car turned the corner fast as we were pulling away from the curb. Scraped my wheel and scared the horse. I yelled, but the guy didn't stop."

"One man?"

"I think so. It was dark, like I said, and the car didn't have any lights."

"What kind of a car?"

The milkman frowned. "I don't know. Big. A sedan. Must have been a dark paint job. And pretty new, too. No jalopy."

Fesler said, "You didn't see the license plate?" No one ever did. This man was no exception.

"Which wheel did he scrape?"

It was the left front wheel. There was an abrasion on the wheel hub, but no paint showed. "She's been hosed down since then," the milkman said. "If any paint scraped off, they probably washed it away."

Fesler said, "You get through about 11?"

"Eleven or 12."

"All right. There'll be someone around to the stable to pick up the wheel when you're through. We'll bring it back when we're finished with it. I'll get in touch with you again."

From an all-night coffee pot he called the laboratory at headquarters, left instructions about the wheel. He got back to his house in time to wash and to attend the requiem mass held for Andy Marola at St. Joseph's.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When it was over, he went home with his wife, and they both avoided discussing the funeral.

He went down to the laboratory in the afternoon. He had slept and was refreshed. He talked with Lewis, who had worked on the milk-wagon wheel.

"We found the paint and gave it a spectrograph. A green paint. We classified the colors and got in touch with the auto companies by phone. You're looking for a Nash '51 or a Buick '51."

Fesler talked with the men who had checked on the stories of Georgie Mink and Kelly. Mink's story was foolproof. He had been seen, in the company of three other men, by a patrolman in Harlem, at exactly 5:25 on the morning in question, arguing with a taxi driver.

Kelly's story stood up too. Patsy Boyle, Little Archie Wenton, and Johnny Eastside all swore that Kelly had been playing cards with them until seven o'clock on the morning of the murder. Fesler said, "Any of that crowd would perjure himself for a beer-bottle top." He thought about it for a time, then he told Cabello, a good man, to register at the Blane and live there for two weeks and see what he could find out.

Fesler was impatient now and moving faster. He didn't bother going to the Motor Vehicle Bureau to check through the list of Nash and Buick owners, as he would ordinarily have done. He followed a hunch and went to the police list of cars that had been reported stolen on the night before Marola's murder, and on the day after. And on the later sheet was a '51 Nash sedan.

The owner was a George Levine, who lived on the West Side in midtown. Fesler went to see him. The evening was cooling, after the heat of the day, and walking was pleasant. The street on which Levine lived was shaded and pleasant, and as he neared the apartment house, Fesler sensed a tangy quality in the air that was refreshing and which sent his memory wandering absently through the past for some forgotten scene.

Mr. Levine was a lawyer, properly distressed about the loss of his car. He had left it in front of his house in the afternoon, as was his habit, expecting the garage driver to pick it up later and take it to the garage. In the morning it would be delivered, as usual. But when he had gone down that morning, the car had not been there. He had called the garage, and they had told him that the driver had called for the car and had been unable to find it. He had then phoned the police and reported the theft.

Fesler then asked the important question: "Where do you garage your car?"

And the answer was, as he had expected, "The Acme — a big place."

He nodded. "Yes, I know." It was Kelly's place.

He thanked Levine, told him he hoped the car would be recovered, and went out into the evening again.

Kelly's six-story garage housed five hundred cars and it would be silly to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

go off on this angle too strongly. If he narrowed the channel of his thinking down to Kelly, he would blind himself to everything else.

He had done all he could for the evening. He walked crosstown to Nick's and ordered a drink, and in a few minutes Kelly came out of the restaurant and walked to the bar. The man, it seemed, intruded upon him at every turn. Kelly was a stupid neon sign that kept flashing on and off in his brain. He knew that Kelly had been eating and drinking at Nick's for years, but nevertheless he felt a slight shock at seeing him here tonight.

Kelly came to a stop beside him. He said, "So you talked to Patsy and Little Archie and Johnny. What did you expect them to say?"

"That they had been playing cards with you," Fesler said. Kelly's body exuded an aura of strength. Fesler felt tired and a hundred years old. He said, "I hear one of your customers had his car stolen the other night."

"I heard about it, too," Kelly said. "What's it got to do with me?"

Fesler shook his head. "Nothing." He looked at the man and suddenly he wondered if he couldn't detect a chink in that armor. Some infinitesimal loss of strength and assurance in the eyes. He knew he was getting too far off on this angle, that he had to leave it before it grew out of proportion. He said again, "Nothing. I just happened to think about it."

"You keep your nose in a lot of things, don't you? A master mind."

Fesler tasted his drink. "A green '51 Nash, it was. And a green '51 Nash scraped a milk wagon right in the neighborhood where Marola was shot, the same morning."

"And now there are ten thousand of you looking for the car, and just because a '51 Nash scraped a milk wagon, you'll frame some poor slob for the job on Marola. When you find the car, you've got your sucker. Is that it?" His voice was heavy with scorn.

"We don't have to frame anybody. You know that."

"Ten thousand guys working together, and you don't frame anybody." Kelly spat on the floor. "A big crowd of clowns knocking their brains out to send a kid up the river for fifteen years."

"He damn near killed a man," Fesler said. "And he went up." But he was talking to himself. Kelly had gone.

He worked incessantly now. There were fifty men on the case. They combed the city for the car and couldn't find it. Fesler slept only when he was exhausted, and his wife's silence and the reproach and fear in her eyes haunted his nights and his days . . .

Finally things began to come Fesler's way.

One of the plainclothesmen working with him came up with a ragged alcoholic, a staggering bum who slept in an appalling board shack on the edge of the river. The human wreck told an incoherent story of having

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen a car drive off the edge of an abandoned coal wharf into the river. Time was a fogged and unreal thing in his mind, and he might have been talking of days or weeks or years ago. He led them to the spot, and the dirty river swirled unbroken and silent under his pointing hand.

Fesler called for a diver and stood on the rotted dock for hours while the man worked. They found the car half a block from the starting point, and then it was only a matter of an hour before a crane had it on a pier.

It was a green '51 Nash. There was paint scraped off the right front mudguard, and it was the Levine car that had been stolen. Fesler called a laboratory squad and they went over it minutely.

And that same evening Cabello had news of a seemingly minor nature. A man who had been running the service elevator at the Blane, on the midnight to morning shift, had quit the day after Marola had been murdered. Fesler sent three men looking for him. Nothing was too small now.

He called in Johnny Eastside and Little Archie, and he talked for hours with them and learned nothing. He got Patsy Boyle over to a precinct house and talked with him amiably for an hour and a half. Boyle had been a fair middleweight in his day, and Fesler spoke of several of Boyle's fights which he had seen, and Boyle was in a warm, comfortable mood when Fesler asked absently, "Who won all the money, the night you were playing cards."

Boyle said, "I dunno. I guess Johnny Morris took most of it out of the game." Then he looked up at Fesler fast and said, "What the hell. That must have been another night."

Things started to move. The huge circle was becoming smaller. A drunken bum, an annoyed milk-wagon driver, a man who had been punched in the head too often and couldn't hold onto his tongue. Fingers pointing, but still pointing in the dark. The laboratory called. Nothing unusual about the car except traces of tar and asphalt on the clutch and brake pedals.

Cabello reported that Johnny Morris, a hoodlum who resembled Kelly in stature and appearance, had been registered at the Blane the night of the killing. The man who had been running the elevator had been found. His name was Gracio and he was on parole after a term as a narcotic peddler. They were bringing him down to headquarters.

It was 11 o'clock in the morning when Fesler obtained the search warrant that would let him into Kelly's apartment. Reagan was with him when he went down. He realized that even now he didn't have enough on Kelly to hold him. The fingers were pointing, but there was a wavering, an uncertainty, in the gesture.

Kelly lived alone in a small but handsome place. Fesler went directly to a bedroom closet while Reagan roamed at large. There were five pairs of shoes on a rack, and he took them all with a prayer and dumped them in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a pillow case. They went through the apartment thoroughly but found no gun; then they took a cab back to headquarters and took the shoes to the laboratory.

They went in to talk with Gracio, the elevator man from the Blane, and in view of the circumstances, he was glad to tell them what he knew. He had done nothing criminal. At 4 o'clock in the morning he had gone to the fourteenth floor in answer to a ring and had taken Kelly to the basement. He had been given a hundred-dollar bill and had been told to find another job the next day. He had done exactly that.

Fesler said, "Four of them went up to the room in the evening, and four came down in the morning. Except that one of them was Morris, which the desk clerk couldn't be expected to know."

Reagan said, "The guy was smart."

Fesler looked at him. "Smart? Hell, we still haven't got a thing on him."

In an hour he heard from the laboratory. On one pair of shoes the lab. had found minute traces of tar and asphalt that matched the specimens taken from the sunken car.

The Inspector said, "That does it."

Fesler said, "No. The tar on the shoes and the tar on the pedals is the same. Okay. Kelly could say he moved the car in the garage, the day before, and got the tar from the pedals."

"But man, we've got to take him."

Fesler shook his head. "He won't run. Once he runs he's licked."

He rubbed a hand across his eyes and checked through his mind for something he knew was there and could not name. He was as tired as a man can be and still keep on his feet. The chase had been long and it was not finished. The quarry was in sight, but the kill had to be made.

He said, "We can put a tail on him just to be safe. But if we grab him now and try him with what we've got, we'll lose him. He'd never confess. Our picture is perfect up to a point, but from there we've still got to develop it." He got to his feet and said, "I'm going home to get some sleep."

He went out into the street and walked toward the subway station. On the way he passed a group of men working on a stretch of macadam, smoothing it level with a steam roller. Nearby, in a small steel cart, gas flames burned under a pot of the mixture.

The pungent odor hit his nose and he was five paces past the work when he stopped and turned, a puzzled frown on his face. The thing came to him then, a picture twenty years old. A street being repaved, and barrels of tar, some in the process of being melted. There had been pieces of tar you could chew, and the taste came back to him.

And suddenly he knew that recently he had been searching for that memory and had been unable to find it, and he recalled the occasion and the place, and he felt a swiftly rising tide of excitement within himself as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he hailed a cab and gave the address of the Levine house, up on the west side.

He got out at the house and paid the cab, then started to look around. He found what he was looking for almost immediately, a large patch of street which had the appearance of being fresher, newer, than the macadam around it. It extended from the near the middle of the street to the curb.

He spoke with the doorman at the house. The man said, "Yeah. About two weeks ago, I guess. Fixing some water pipes."

He found a phone and called the Water Department, and while they checked their records he inhaled furiously on a cigarette. Then a clerk's voice told him, yes, there had been work at that address. It had been finished on the fourteenth, and the repaving had been done by the fifteenth. The work had been completed in the early afternoon, but the protecting wooden horses hadn't been removed until after 5 o'clock, when the crew was through and the day was cooling.

He called the inspector and said, "The tar does it. Levine parked his car in a patch of new paving. Kelly must have been the one who stole it, because he had to walk through the new asphalt to get in it, and no one had been in it before him. It was simple enough. The garage had a key to the car, and all Kelly had to do was lift the key from the board one day and have a duplicate made."

He was alive with the thing, now. He said, "Pick him up. He can't talk himself out of this and he's bound to talk himself into it. Send a couple of men to his house. And to Nick's. He might be there."

He hung up and walked out on the street and went toward a subway, and suddenly he was cursing himself for a fool. He had forgotten the garage entirely, probably because he knew that Kelly spent little time there.

He walked into the street office, and a man looked up and said, "Yeah? What can we do for you?"

"Joe Kelly around? I was just passing by and thought I'd stop in. I'm a friend of his."

The man looked him over carefully and seemed satisfied. "Yeah, I think I saw him come in. He's got an office up on the fourth floor." He reached for a wall phone and took the receiver off the hook. "What's ya name?"

Fesler's gun was in his hand, and he said, "Put it back on the hook." The man slowly obeyed. Fesler told him "Get up and walk to the door in front of me."

He walked the man to the door and out onto the street. He showed him his badge, and said, "Just keep walking. When you reach the corner, turn right. Don't come back for a while."

The man looked at him wordlessly, then shrugged and started walking slowly toward the corner. He looked back once, then turned and was out of sight.

Fesler went back to the office and used the desk phone to call the local

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

precinct house and told them to get a couple of men over right away. If Kelly was here he had lost his tail, for there had been no one on the street.

He went into the garage proper, and down at one end two men were washing a car. They paid no attention to him. He saw a heavy elevator, then a curving drive-ramp that led to the upper floors. He chose the ramp. The elevator was slow, and if he used it he would draw attention to himself. If Kelly were on the fourth floor and tried to use the elevator, Fesler could catch him before he got to the street.

He went toward the ramp and started up. There was a lump of ice in his belly. His mouth was dry and his feet were reluctant, and never in his life had he been so lonely. His footsteps sounded loud and hollow, and when he reached the first floor, the noise of movement on the street floor was lost to him. He turned with the ramp and went up, his gun heavy in his hand.

He was between the third and fourth floors, walking carefully and as softly as he could, when he heard movement above him. He hurried and reached the floor level just in time to see Kelly, a traveling bag in one hand, start across the car-littered floor from a housing that was built in the opposite corner.

Fesler said, "Kelly!" and the man turned. He dropped the bag and hauled a gun from his pocket and fired once, then ducked behind a car. Fesler dove for the protection of a heavy sedan, and strangely, now, he was not frightened.

He knew Kelly must have been warned when the man had taken the receiver off the hook of the wall phone. He had probably heard Fesler tell the man to hang it up, had realized, that it was time to leave.

Fesler knew there were only three cars separating them. He raised his head for a look and Kelly fired and the bullet went into the engine hood of the car that hid Fesler.

Fesler got to his belly on the concrete flooring. He looked hard, saw Kelly's feet not ten yards away. He took careful aim, fired, and missed, then fired again. Kelly came down, shouting, and Fesler fired again. Kelly looked up at him his eyes filled with hatred. Fesler picked up the other gun and put it in his pocket. It was probably the same one that killed Marola. He looked at Kelly and wondered clinically just how the man felt. And how had Andy felt when Kelly had driven up in the car, lowered the window and called Andy over, then blasted him down coldly and in blind hatred.

He sat there, waiting for someone to come, and suddenly fatigue fell from him like a discarded coat. He thought of Mary, and her fears and complaints, and looked at Kelly and grinned stupidly. He said, "A show tonight. Dinner out, then a good show. That should smooth her out. After all, what do you expect a woman to know about her husband's work?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Best "First Story" in EQMM's Tenth Annual Contest

Last year's contest produced thirteen "first stories" worthy of publication — thus tying the record for "first stories" established in our Eighth and Ninth contests. The discovery of more than a dozen new talents in any single year is perhaps the most encouraging aspect of our annual competitions; for nothing is so important to the future of any literary form as the emergence of new writers. Consider, for example, what happened last year: First Prize of $1500 was won by Stanley Ellin; yet only seven years ago Stanley Ellin submitted his first story and won the special award for the best "first story" of that year — a newcomer to the field in our Third Annual Contest, the winner of First Prize in our Tenth . . . and it can happen to you!

We are happy to announce in this issue that EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest is now officially open. Again we are offering a special prize of $500 for the best "first story" to be submitted between now and October 20, 1955. So we repeat our yearly invitation: if any of you have the secret ambition to change your status from reader to writer, and particularly to try your hand at a detective, crime, or mystery short story — even as short as 1500 words — we urge you to take the plunge. If you have what it takes, your story may win one of the regular prizes, including the $1500 First Prize or the $1000 Special Award of Merit; or it may win the $500 award for the best "first story"; or it may be purchased at our regular space rates for "first stories"; in any event, its baptism in print will bring you renown as well as remuneration, and your name will appear, with those of old masters and new, in the most respected Who's Who of Detectivedom.

In last year's contest the $500 prize for the best "first story" went to Sylvia Farnham Bachrach for "The Walk-Away Kid." This is the story of a farmer and his wife and the strange and beautiful young man who came walking out of nowhere with a carpetbag swinging in his hand — an old satchel that contained such wondrous things as three ordinary stones, three copper buttons, the rusty and cracked face of a clock, and a grotesque little doll with a hole in its head. We think you will be genuinely moved by this story; it has exceptional characterizations for a new writer, and an extremely poetic style.

The author was 26 years old when she submitted "The Walk-Away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kid" to last year's contest. She was born in Lynchburg, Virginia, was graduated from the University of Chicago, is married, and has two children. Professionally, she is an actress — her last Broadway assignment was understudy to Uta Hagen in "Saint Joan." She began to write almost as a hobby — to pass the time while "at liberty." When work in the theatre became slow, Mrs. Bachrach found that she was writing more and more, and soon the hobby developed into (using her own words) "a ravenous and fascinating monster."

Now, with the appearance in print of her first story, Mrs. Bachrach is perhaps on her way to an entirely new career. We wish her the very best; she has a "feel" for words, an instinct for drama, an insight into people — indeed, her theatrical experience has served her unusually well.

THE WALK-AWAY KID

by SYLVIA FARNHAM BACHRACH

LEORA HEARD HIM SINGING WAY OFF, soft and chanty like a little kid crooning to himself. But he was no kid, he was tall, with a thatch of straw-colored hair and wide blue eyes, puppy eyes, thick black lashes on them. It was sinful for a young man to be that beautiful. He stopped when he got to her, smiling in his friendly way, and dropped his carpet satchel in the mud.

"Now that's right silly," Leora said.

"Yes'm," the boy smiled. "You want to see?"

"See what?"

He nodded toward the satchel. "You kin look if you want."

Leora took a step backwards, wiping her hands on her cotton dress. An April breeze furled suddenly through the redbud which grew wild in the clearing. "Sure," she said uneasily. "Sure I'll look."

The young man fell to his knees in the mud and began to tug at the rope which bound the carpetbag. With a clatter, it fell open. There were three stones in the top of it, common everyday stones. And underneath them, wrapped in dirty tissue paper, were three copper buttons. Then there was the face of a clock, rusted and cracked, with the numbers one and seven chipped off. Rattling around the bottom was a grotesquely prim head of a doll. The back of the doll's head was a jagged hole.

Leora stared incredulously. "Lordy," she muttered. "What's all that for?"

The boy was frowning slightly, crestfallen. "Mine," he said.

"But what's it for?"

He lowered his head, knotting the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rope around the satchel. "You didn't need to look," he muttered.

Leora glanced at him quickly. "I'm not laughin' at you," she said. "I wouldn't laugh."

A new radiance illuminated his face. "You kin laugh if you want," he said.

"But what's it all for?" Leora said. "What do you do with that stuff?"

The boy got a crafty look about him, bending low over the satchel. His lips curved in a jerky little smile and his eyelids fell half down. "A button for a stone and a stone for a button," he chanted. "Some day when I know rightly how to do it they'll all turn into buttons, all them stones and rocks around everywhere. And all the ladies will be surprised."

"They sure will," Leora said drily.

"And the baby broke her head and all her brains fell out. But we keep lookin' for 'em."

"What about that clock?"

The boy became grave. "I don't know," he whispered.

Leora turned abruptly and began pulling down the dry wash and stuffing it into the clothes basket. The backyard was bare of growth except for the dead weeds that clustered raggedly around the goat pen and the chicken house, but the redbud and the dogwood in the clearing and on down the side of the mountain were in full bloom. Soft, sweeping bursts of deep pink and white — it was mean, Leora thought sometimes, to sit in that broken-down farmhouse and look at all that prettiness and know none of it could change you. She brushed angrily at the wiry hair which clung to her temples and the back of her neck. She was a small woman, but there was a sharpness about her. Even her eyes, round and black, were sharpened by the light they reflected; and when she reached for something, like the wash above her head, her hands darted like tiny, persistent beaks.

"Git up from there," she said to the boy. "You're gittin' dirty."

He scrambled awkwardly to his feet, looking down at the red clay plastered to his clothes, smoothing it curiously with his hands.

Leora giggled. "You sure are a mess."

Gleefully the boy laughed, too.

"You'd better git down to the barn," Leora said. "My husband Jonah's down there. He'll git you dry overalls and show you where to wash. There's a room over the tool house where you can sleep. But tell Jonah not to start you workin' yet. You can both come eat now. Here," she added abruptly as the boy started off, "I'll take care of your bag for you."

The boy moved across the yard, loping like a young animal. When he reached the path to the barn he turned back to Leora. "You kin look any time," he said shyly, and then broke into a run.

When he was out of sight Leora lifted the bag and opened it quickly. Fumbling for the doll's head, she ran her finger over the little upturned mouth and touched the wide, staring blue eyes. Impulsively she put it in her apron pocket.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jonah stood diffidently by the screen door. Waiting, as she had told him to wait, until the boy was out of sight. "That was a mighty fine feed, missus," he said cautiously. He was a big man, like an ox, with a rough gray beard and flat-looking eyes.

"Same as you've been gittin' for twenty-three years," Leora said. She shoved the pot of salt pork and greens off the hot part of the wood stove and tugged irritably at the laundry basket, dragging it over to the table.

"He's down by the barn," Jonah said, kicking open the screen door and leaning out of it. "I'd better be gittin' there myself. New hands take a lotta watching the first coupla days. After, it's easier. Right good boy, this, even if he ain't right in the head. Ralph Mulholland found him down at the market this last Saturday."

"You told me already," Leora said wearily.

"Eighteen years old, Ralph said. Looks younger. Been wanderin' some, lookin' for work. Four dollars a week is pretty good pay."

"If we'd had four dollars a week clear for all the time we're married we'd be outa here long since."

"What you want to git outa here for?"

"Because I'm sick of it!" Leora yelled suddenly. "I'm sick to death of dirt and scroungin' and killin' myself for nothin' but the same old days one after the other."

"I guess maybe we could take in a show next Saturday, if you're willin'."

"Big doings!"

Jonah said nothing, scratching uncomfortably at his beard.

"You go hire us a crazy hand and then git us off to a show like nothin's wrong." She flung a handful of clothespins at his feet. "I'll be pickin' up after him like a kid, mendin' clothes that he ain't got sense enough not to git torn."

"Maybe we should of had us a kid," Jonah mumbled.

"You've gotta go and hire us a crazy hand!"

"There ain't no one else. They're all gone to the factories. Nobody to work farms in this part of Virginia no more, you know it."

"I know it. I know there's someone grown up in the head who'd come to work for four dollars a week if you'd had the sense to find him!" Raging, she tore into a pile of clothes and scattered them over the table.

"Leora honey, please. I've just gotta git that fencin' done."

"Oh, you keep him. You keep him and see how much work you git outa him. And serve you right!" Leora burst into tears. She sank into a chair. Jonah lumbered over to her, touching her shoulder shyly. His face was furrowed with concern and helplessness.

"Honey, what is it?" he said.

"I don't know," she sobbed. "I just don't know. I just want to do different in my life. I'm forty-six and it's all over and I want it to be different . . . I don't want to wear shoes no more when I walk in the fields . . ."

Awkwardly, Jonah patted her shoulder. For a moment she permitted it,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then she flailed out, striking him on the leg. "Git away from me," she gasped convulsively. "Git away."

He walked across the kitchen, his great shoulders hunching as he went through the door.

From the multitude of farm sounds — the cackling of the geese, the flapping of the wet sheets on the line, the distant lowing of the cows, the bleating of the goat, the rustling of the breeze in the budding apple tree by the back porch — from all of these sounds the buzz of a wasp detached itself. Leora, her face mottled and stark, turned sharply, her eyes darting over the ceiling.

The wasp had reached the window beside the kitchen door and was bobbing up and down, clicking against the glass. Leora rose heavily, her eyes narrow with hatred. Stealthily she lifted a work shirt from the pile of laundry. The wasp was hovering over the window latch, attracted by the gleam of sunlight on it.

Leora moved in a crouch, dragging the shirt along the floor behind her. Her feet in their rubber-soled sneakers made no sound. The wasp droned ominously as it dove toward the bottom of the window. Leora flung the shirt and the wasp dropped at her feet.

She stepped back quickly, crouching lower. Her mouth was quivering. The wasp lay on its back, still. If it had remained still she might have crouched there until her legs gave out. But suddenly it began to move its legs. With a fierce cry, Leora smashed the shirt into the floor again and again until the wasp was a tiny group of pulpy fragments . . .

Sheriff Mulholland looked down at the body lying on the floor of the milk house. It was sprawled wildly across the cement, one arm flung outward. It was my doing, the sheriff thought, shaking his head in bewilderment. I sent that boy here. It was my doing and there must be a reason in that somewhere . . .

The next morning, the second morning of the time the boy was there, Leora crept quietly into his room over the tool house. It had been bare and musty, not very clean, with a cot and dirty mattress rolled up on it. Something smelled peculiar as she made her way up the steep box-like steps and when she opened the door she saw the whitewash bucket just inside. The room looked odd, white like that. The mattress was unrolled and an old quilt was over it, faded but warm and pleasant-looking. He must have had it with him, stuffed in the bottom of that bag of his. Lord knows where he got the whitewash, maybe Jonah gave it to him. It was all different, the room. Where it had been empty and uncared for, it now looked as if someone had moved everything out of it on purpose, just because they liked it bare and clean-looking. The bed was over by the window, which was funny because it was cold by the window at night. Crazy boy.

She heard a sound behind her and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wheeled. "Lordy," she gasped. "You sure can be quiet."

The boy smiled. His eyes looked bluer in the clear morning light. "I'm here," he said.

"I was lookin' for you," Leora said, running her hand through her wiry brown hair in some confusion. "I wondered if it was goin' all right."

The boy nodded.

"Plenty of work," she said.

"I like it."

"If you git tired you tell Jonah. Takes a while, sometimes, to git in the swing of it."

"I don't git tired," the boy said.

"Lucky. I'm tired all the time, it seems like."

"You should learn countin'," the boy suggested.

"Countin'." Leora looked blank. "What's that for?"

"Tellin' numbers," the boy explained. "Everything's got numbers and if you find 'em you kin think 'em and you don't git tired."

"You mean how many peas you're shellin' or how many ears of corn you pulled?"

"Sort of," said the boy.

"I'd go crazy," Leora laughed.

"No, ma'am."

Leora glanced at him. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean nothin' personal."

"No, ma'am," said the boy. "There's other kinds of numbers, too, when you git to 'em. The best kinds."

Warily Leora moved away from him, fingering something in her apron pocket. The wind blew in freshly from the open window, fluttering the quilt on the cot. She pointed to it. "Why'd you put your bed over there?" she asked. "It's too cold."

"So I kin listen to the stars."

"*Listen?*"

"Yes'm."

Leora whispered, "What do they say to you?"

The boy leaned against the door, his thumbs hooked over the rope which belted his overalls. "It's like they're movin' and the movin' is the numbers. The movin' and the numbers is the same. It's like a dream, livin' like we do. If we dream it right we kin make the stars move different."

"Why," Leora breathed, "should they move different?"

"Just because. If we dream it right. Like the buttons and the stones. They could change if we want 'em to."

"What does it feel like to think that way?" Leora said, her breath coming quickly. "Could I do it?"

The boy regarded her doubtfully. "Most people don't want to," he said. "They're afraid."

"I'm not afraid."

"No, ma'am."

"Are you afraid?"

"Sometimes. But I forgit."

"I wouldn't be afraid."

Abruptly the boy opened the door, a look of uncertainty on his face. "I'd better be gittin' down to the barn."

"Wait a minute," Leora said anxiously. "I haven't learned it yet. I won't tell anybody else, I swear I won't."

"I'd better be gittin' down," the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

boy said again, his lips set. "I never talked about it before."

"Look," Leora said, digging into her pocket. "I brought this for you. I fixed it."

The boy watched suspiciously as she took out the doll's head and held it up. She had fashioned a skull covering out of a faded sock and sewed in hair of bright yellow thread. The doll's face was washed and rubbed shiny. Tentatively, she offered it to him. "I hope you aren't mad or nothin'," she said.

Transfixed, the boy extended his hand. He examined the doll in silence. "Her head's all cured," he murmured, "and she's got hair now like me."

"Is it okay?" Leora asked timidly.

The boy looked up at her and the light came over his face again. There were tears in his eyes. "Did you put her brains back in?"

"Yes," Leora said.

The boy turned back to the doll's head. "She's pretty," he whispered. "She's awful pretty."

Leora touched her own face, feeling a curious dullness come over her. "Do you think I'm pretty?" she blurted.

The boy stared at her. "Yes'm," he said. "Yes'm, you're pretty."

Bewildered, elated, Leora ran from the room.

"That's a real walk-away kid," someone said.

Mulholland smiled grimly. He remembered the legend. How Adam asked the Lord to make some people for him and Eve to talk to. And how the Lord went down by the river bank and made people out of water and clay and stacked them up against the fence to dry so He could put their brains in. But the next morning, when He came back, the people had all dried and walked away, no brains in any of them, gone to populate the earth.

The sheriff looked at the boy in wonderment. A walk-away kid. No brains in him, but still the bone-memory of that earliest day when the glory of the Lord shone around him and the hand of the Lord was shaping his face.

It was two days later — when Leora took the ducks down to the stream — that it happened. The ducks got excited and were running free in the field. Leora took after them with a long stick, but by the time she got them together again they were in the woods, and it was easier to go down to the stream through the deepest part of the woods than back through the field. The stream was rougher there, more winding, and if there had been any young ones they might have got lost.

Resentfully Leora pushed her way through the woods, switching the ducks and shouting at them. The underbrush was pretty thick, just beginning to green up and hard to get through. She wiped her face with the back of her hand, pulled her thin sweater loose from a bramble, and then suddenly there was the boy on the mossy bank of the stream.

For a moment she was too surprised to say anything. The ducks scrambled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down the bank and splashed into the water, disappearing around a bend a few feet away.

The boy looked up and smiled.

It was early afternoon and Jonah had gone to town. Maybe the boy should have been working on the fence and maybe not. Anyway, that was probably how he got here, working on that part of the fence that came down by the woods.

Leora felt shy all of a sudden.

"I'm makin' me a house," said the boy. "You kin help if you like." His face was shadowed by the cool bower of the forest. Overhead a single dogwood caught a shaft of sunlight, its blossoms quivering whitely.

Leora looked at the mound of earth beneath the boy's feet. The foundation was made of small stones with moss piled up the sides. The roof was crisscrossed with twigs.

"I'm coverin' it over," the boy said, "so it can't rain inside."

Leora sat down beside him, pulling her dress over her bare knees. Her face was flushed from tramping through the woods, and her hair, all bushed out from the wind and branches, had a leaf caught in it. The boy reached up and untangled the leaf carefully.

"It's pretty," he said. "A young one." He fondled it for a moment and then laid it carefully on the top of his house. "There," he said happily. "That kin be a tree growin' out of the roof."

"Why do you want a tree growin' there?" Leora whispered.

"So the bird kin sing on it," the boy said. "He sings like all the different birds, but he's just singin' like hisself really. He can't fool 'em."

"You mean the mockingbird?"

"Yes'm," said the boy. "It must be fine to feel like singin' like that. I feel like that sometimes, but I don't sing so good."

Remembering the song — the song that heralded his arrival on the farm — Leora disagreed. The nearness of the boy was overwhelming her; she felt his every movement, the very breath of his body. When he lifted his arm to point to the sky, her own arm tingled as if it had suddenly come alive.

She reached out to the leaf, brushing his hand. "It's a pretty house," she said, the sound of her voice pounding inside her head. "I wish we could get inside it . . . you and me, and be . . . alone."

"Yes'm," the boy said.

She touched his cheek with the leaf and he smiled and pushed her hand away. She dabbed the leaf at his face again, giggling. He caught her hand.

"Do you like me?" whispered Leora.

"Yes'm," said the boy. "I reckon I like you all right. But I've got to finish up my house and git workin' on the fence again."

"Never mind your house," Leora said feverishly. "We'll build us another house, you and me. And I'll show you a game, pretty boy, a pretty game for you and me . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That night Leora moved her bed over by the window. Jonah started to complain, it being his bed too, but changed his mind. She'd killed a chicken fresh for supper and fried it up with good brown gravy. And she had been friendly that night, too. Not giving in or anything, that had been over long since; Jonah went to town sometimes and stayed late, and if Leora knew why she never said. But she was nicer, somehow.

It was nice having the boy around, too, even if you couldn't understand what he said half the time. He worked good and the fencing was almost done. And Leora had taken to him now — she'd got over being mad. Even being crazy, there was something about the boy you couldn't help liking, the way he worked and all. Like it was his own farm. It was almost like having a son.

One morning when he had to go in town to pick up some feed, Leora went with Jonah, sitting high in the truck and looking real pretty with her hair flying out from under a little straw hat. She was grumpy about the hat, it being too early for straw, she said, and not having a Spring hat. But she cheered up after she had bought herself some earrings, long ones that dangled down her cheeks, and a belt buckle with red and blue markings and very thin silver around it, like lace. She got herself some new sandals, too, and that night she put some lipstick on her mouth.

She fixed a good supper and when the boy came in she made a special point of showing him the earrings, leaning down to where he was sitting and shaking her head in front of him and laughing. The boy took hold of one of them and pulled it off her ear, holding it up to the light so it would swing around and sparkle. Leora got kind of funny then and grabbed it back from him. She said something about his not noticing anything, and Jonah said that was natural, him being a child and all. And suddenly Leora sat in Jonah's lap, with the boy looking at them, and began to kiss him and run her hands through Jonah's hair the way she'd done when they were first married. Jonah was too surprised to do anything but sit there and wonder, remembering the young girl she used to be.

She kept on wearing the earrings and the sandals, and putting more paint on her face. The next time Jonah could get in town, which was Saturday, he took five dollars out of his savings and bought her a new hat.

On the way home, with the hatbox all done up fancy on the seat beside him, Jonah felt kind of shy, the way he did when he was courting. It was funny the way she'd changed all of a sudden and started acting young and loving. But then winter was hard on a woman; maybe all she had needed was to feel the spring around her and know warm weather was coming. It was going to be nice from now on, having a woman waiting for him when he came in from the barns, fixing a good supper, and being affectionate.

There was nobody around when he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

got to the farm. Jonah thought the boy was probably down whitewashing the pump house, like he'd told him to.

Carrying the gaudy hatbox, he wandered through the deserted farmhouse, calling once or twice. No telling where Leora was. Maybe she took the ducks out. He could go down to the field and call her. Holding the hatbox awkwardly, he crossed the backyard and went behind the tool house toward the field.

When he first heard the voices, he didn't recognize them. He never heard the boy speak much anyway, and Leora's voice was high and quavery, as if she was crying. Jonah looked up at the window of the tool house and then leaned heavily against the boards, emptied of all feeling.

"Do you think I *want* him pawin' over me?" Leora was saying hysterically.

"No, ma'am," said the boy. He sounded bewildered.

"I only did it to make you look at me, and you never look at me any different from the way you look at that doll!" Her voice was suddenly rich with spite. "I could be dead and you wouldn't care. You never say nothin' about lovin' me. You never say I'm pretty. You don't care what I'm wearin' or how I look!"

"Yes'm," said the boy. "I think you're pretty."

"Prettier'n that doll?"

"Yes'm," said the boy docilely.

"I could kill you!" Leora shrieked, and then came the sounds of weeping. "You've gotta grow up now. Don't you want things to be like they was?"

"Yes'm," said the boy. "I liked the way it was."

"Then you've gotta grow up," Leora pleaded. "You've gotta see me like a woman."

She was running down the steps now and Jonah turned and hid on the other side of the tool house. Leora stumbled down toward the barn, carrying a pail of chicken feed and crying. Jonah stood still. He had dropped the hatbox in the muddy weeds. After a minute, he heard the boy down in the tool house pulling something off the wall and clanking it. Jonah edged around and looked in the door.

The boy was squatting on the floor, scraping the mud off a pitchfork. His face was turned away, but Jonah could see how his cheek was flushed and hot, as if he'd been scolded and was rebellious about it.

"I could kill him," Jonah thought without any feeling. Other men killed for that and the law let them off easy, it being their right to protect their home. "I could kill him and then go tell Ralph why I did it. Ralph would help me."

The boy turned and looked up at him, his face wistful and forlorn. He said nothing; he just looked, hopefully, asking for something, maybe. Not forgiveness, because he was too crazy to know he'd done anything wrong. Jonah stared back at him.

It was then that the fierce and terrible certainty came to Jonah that he could have loved this boy as if he were his own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

With a hoarse sob, Jonah lumbered toward the barn. Leora looked up at him, her eyes red from crying.

And she knew then, and was afraid.

"He killed himself," Leora said hysterically. "He killed himself. He had to kill himself. You can see the gun there where he did it."

"Ma'am," said the sheriff reluctantly, "it's mighty hard to shoot yourself in the back of the head with a rifle."

"I'm goin' to the state troopers," Jonah said, breathing heavily. "I'm goin' to git that boy taken away from here. I can't kill him. I thought about killin' him, but I can't do it." He clamped his lips painfully, not daring to say why.

"The farm's half in my name," Leora whimpered desperately. "The boy's workin' for me, too."

"I know that," said Jonah. "I'm goin' to ask them about that." He stared at her for another long moment, begging mutely for the word, half-hidden somewhere, that could push it all away, turn it all back to where they were before, just the three of them working together, with Leora getting young again.

But Leora turned wildly and ran back to the tool house.

Jonah stumbled over to the Ford and drove it out of the barn. He was gone for an hour. When he got back he went directly to the milk house, where they found him later with a rifle bullet in the back of his skull.

The boy sat quietly in the sheriff's office, his hands still in his lap, his face vacant. He had not spoken the whole time, not since they found him under the bed in Leora's room where she had hidden him. Leora was in a corner, hunched in a chair, weeping and muttering over and over again, "Jonah killed himself. He killed himself." Sheriff Mulholland, his lanky body stretched wearily behind the desk, had quit trying to disagree. The pattern of the wound showed that the gun had been fired from a distance of at least twelve inches. The farmer had died instantly. Even if Jonah had been able to rig up something so that he could pull the trigger himself, the gun would have recoiled about ten feet, not having anybody holding it. But the gun was lying beside him.

There was a motive, too, that figured. The troopers remembered Jonah's coming in that afternoon to find out how to get rid of a hand his wife wanted to keep on. They told him to go see a Justice of the Peace and have a warrant issued. He didn't say what the trouble was, but it was pretty obvious — the hired hand fooling around with the wife, the wife not wanting to let him go, the husband trying to find a peaceful way out. Yes, it figured.

They'd been in the office half the night now, waiting for one of the two to talk.

And then the boy got up — as if he'd been lost and was just finding his way back. He dug into the pocket of his overalls and pulled out a doll's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head. It was cracked through the middle, as if it had been thrown down hard. The boy gazed at it for a minute, puzzled; then he looked up at Mulholland and smiled a strange and beautiful smile that left the sheriff feeling he'd seen something too fine for a man to stare at.

The boy came toward Mulholland purposefully, holding out his hand. The sheriff rose and gravely extended his own hand and the boy shook it, standing straight and tall before him, his face all lit up.

His voice was sweet.

"I did it," he said. "She made me."

Bow Street Runner on the Case

A "Bow Street Runner" was once sent to inspect a house which had been entered by burglars. After careful examination of the locks, he pronounced that it was so cleverly done that it could only have been effected by one of three or four men who were skilled in such work.

Thereupon he returned to town, and visited one of those houses where thieves resort. Entering into conversation, he asked, casually: "Where's such a man?" and "I don't see —," and presently it came out that one man whom he knew by name had not been seen since the day of the robbery.

His next step was to visit the different coach offices, and after some inquiries he at last discovered that a man like the one in question had gone down with luggage to Oxford the day after the robbery.

The Runner went to Oxford and set about tracing the man in this way: He dressed himself very shabbily, and visited the different little inns on the outskirts of the town, saying at each:

"I want a pot of beer for —," naming the man he wished to find.

He was met with:

"We don't know such a person here."

To which he replied:

"Oh! it's a mistake, then — no matter."

And so on, till at last the answer was:

"I'll send it."

"No," says the Runner, "that won't do; he's in a hurry, and I'm to go with you."

He went, and found his man, and some of the stolen property in his possession.

— Source Unknown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Margery Allingham lives in Essex, England, and her telephone exchange has the captivating name of Tolleshunt D'Arcy. But no one can get Miss Allingham on the phone while she is writing. No, the number itself isn't a private one — Margery has her own personal way of achieving isolation. She works in the attic which can be reached only by a ladder, and when she starts the day's (or night's) writing, she cuts herself off from the world and its telephones by simply pulling the ladder up after her. But visualize the scene: Margery Allingham working alone in the attic of an old English house — and is it blood and thunder we get from Margery's typewriter? No, it is always a suave, intelligent, often a sophisticated, and more often a subtle study in crime, character, and manners. And this time there is even more: a detectival dip into the fascination of a "locked room" and the piquancy of an "impossible crime." Attic writing, indeed!

THE UNSEEN DOOR

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

IT WAS LONDON, IT WAS HOT, AND IT was Sunday afternoon. The billiard room in Prinny's Club, Pall Mall, which has often been likened to a mausoleum, had unexpectedly become one.

Superintendent Stanislaus Oates glanced down at the body again and swore softly to Mr. Albert Campion, the elegant amateur of criminal investigation who had just been admitted.

"I hate miracles!" Oates said grimly.

Campion drew the sheet gently back from the terrible face.

"Our friend here could hardly have been taken by this one," he murmured, his pale eyes growing bleak behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "Strangled? Oh, yes, I see — from behind. Powerful fingers. Horrid. Who did it?"

"I know who ought to have done it." Oates was savage. "I know who's been threatening to do it for months and yet he wasn't here. That's why I sent for you. You like this four-dimensional stuff. I don't. See anyone in the hall as you came up?"

"About forty police experts and two very shaken old gentlemen, both on the fragile side. Who are they — witnesses?"

The Superintendent sighed. "Listen," he commanded. "This club is partly closed for cleaning. The only two rooms unlocked are the vestibule downstairs and this billiard room up

Copyright, 1946, by Margery Allingham

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here. The only two people in the place are Bowser, the doorkeeper, and Chetty, the little lame billiard marker."

"The two I mentioned?"

"Yes. Bowser has been in the vestibule all the time. He's a great character in clubland. Knows everybody and has a reputation for infallibility. You couldn't break him down in the witness box."

"I've heard of him. He gave me a particularly baleful stare as I came in."

"That's his way. Does it to everybody. He's become a bit affected — as these old figureheads do in time. He's been a power here for forty years, remember. Surly old chap, but he never forgets a face."

"Beastly for him. And who's this?" Campion indicated the white mound at their feet. "Just a poor wretched member?"

"That," Oates spoke dryly, "is Robert Fenderson, the man who exposed William Merton."

Albert Campion was silent. The story of the Merton crash, which had entailed the arrest of the flamboyant financier after a thousand small speculators had faced ruin, was still fresh in everyone's mind. Merton had been taken to the cells shouting threats at Judge, jury, and witnesses alike, and photographs of his heavy jaw and sultry eyes had appeared in every newspaper.

"Merton broke jail last night."

"Did he, by Jove!" Campion's brows rose. "Was he a member here once?"

"Until his arrest. Knows the place like his own house. More than that, someone sent Fenderson a phony message this morning telling him to meet the club secretary here this afternoon at 3. The secretary is away this weekend and knows nothing about it. I tell you, Campion, it's an open and shut case — except for one thing. Merton hasn't been here — unless he flew in through a window."

Campion glanced at the casements bolted against the heat. "He hardly flew out again."

"Exactly, and there's nowhere for him to be hidden. Bowser swears that he went all over the club after lunch and found it deserted. Since then he's been at the door all the time. During the afternoon only one member came in, and that was Fenderson. The only other living soul to cross the threshold was Chetty, who is far too frail to have strangled a cat, let alone a man with a neck like Fenderson's. From his box Bowser has a perfect view of the street door, the staircase, and this door. He insists he has neither slept nor left his seat. He's unshakable."

"Has the unyielding Bowser a soft spot for Merton?"

Oates was nettled. "I thought of that at once, naturally," he said acidly, "but the evidence is all the other way. One could even suspect Bowser of having a grudge against the chap. Merton made a complaint about him just before the crash. It was a stupid petty quarrel — some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing about who should say 'Good morning' first, member or club servant? Merton is like that, very self-important and a born bully. Bowser is a graceless taciturn old chap, but I swear he's speaking the truth. He hasn't seen Merton this afternoon."

Mr. Campion glanced round the spacious room, its walls lined with cue-racks and an occasional bookcase.

"All of which leaves us with the lame marker, I take it," he ventured.

"The perishing little fool!" The Superintendent exploded. "He isn't helping. He's gone to pieces and is trying to say he hasn't been here this afternoon. He lives in the mews at the back of the building, and he's trying to say he played hooky after lunch today — says he thought no one would be in to play. Actually, anyone can see what did happen. He dropped in, found Fenderson didn't want a game, and went out again very sensibly. Now he doesn't want to appear as the last man to have seen the poor chap alive. I've told him he's doing himself no good by lying. Hang it all, Bowser *saw* him."

"And so . . . ?"

"And so there must be another way into this room, but I'm damned if I see it." The Superintendent stalked over to the windows again and Campion stood watching him.

"I'd like a word with Bowser," Campion ventured at last.

"Have it. Have it by all means." Oates was exasperated. "I've put him through it very thoroughly though — you'll never shake him."

Campion said nothing, but waited until the doorkeeper came in a few moments later, stalking gravely behind the sergeant who had been sent for him. He was a typical man of trust, a little shaky now and in his seventies, but still an imposing figure with a wooden expression on a proud old face, chiefly remarkable for its firm mouth and bristling white eyebrows. He glowered at Campion and did not speak, but at the first question a faint smile softened his lips.

"How many times have I seen Chetty come into the club in my life, sir? Why, I shouldn't like to say — several thousand, must be."

"Has he always been lame?"

"Why yes, sir. It's a deformity of the hip he's had all his life. He couldn't have done this, sir, any more than I could — neither of us has the strength."

"I see." Campion went over to a bookcase at the far end of the long room and came back presently with something in his hand.

"Mr. Bowser," he said slowly, "look at this. I suggest to you that it is a photograph of the man you really saw come in and go out of the club this afternoon when Mr. Fenderson was already here."

The old man's hand shook so violently that he could scarcely take the paper, but he seized it at last and with an effort held it steady.

"No, sir," he said firmly, "that face is unknown to me. Chetty came in and went out. No one else, and that's the truth, sir."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I believe you think it is, Bowser." Mr. Campion spoke gently and his lean face wore a curious expression in which pity predominated. "Here's your unseen door, Superintendent," he said softly. Oates snatched the paper and turned it over.

"Good God! What's this?" he demanded. "It's a blank brown page — from the back of a book, isn't it?"

Mr. Campion met his eyes.

"Bowser has just told us it's a face he doesn't know," he murmured. "You see, Oates, Bowser doesn't recognize faces, he recognizes voices. That's why he glares until people speak. Bowser didn't *see* Chetty this afternoon, he heard his very distinctive step — a step which Merton could have imitated very easily. I fancy you'll learn that when there was that little unpleasantness earlier in the year, Merton guessed something which no one else in the club has known. When did it come on, Bowser?"

The old man stood trembling before them.

"I — I didn't want to have to leave the club, sir," he blurted out pathetically. "I know everyone's voice. I could still do my work. It's only got really bad in the last six months — my daughter comes and fetches me home at night. It *was* Chetty's step, sir, and I knew he could never have done it."

"Blind!" The word escaped the Superintendent huskily. "Good Lord! Campion, how did you know?"

It was some time before Mr. Campion could be prevailed upon to tell him, and when he did he was suitably diffident.

"When I first passed through the hall," he said, "Bowser glared at me as I told you, but as I came upstairs I heard him say to a constable: 'Another detective, I suppose?' "

He paused, and his smile was engaging as he flicked an imaginary speck from an immaculate sleeve.

"I wondered then if there was something queer about his eyesight — no offense, of course, Oates old boy."

THE NATL. SOCIETY FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN AND ADULTS, INC. 11 S. LASALLE STREET, CHICAGO 3, ILL.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

First, a little historical background: With the publication in 1894 of L. T. Meade's and Dr. Clifford Halifax's STORIES FROM THE DIARY OF A DOCTOR, *the detective story commenced a new trend — to the so-called "medical mystery." Actually, the trend had been foreshadowed by some of the stories in* TALES OF ECCENTRIC LIFE, *written by Dr. William A. Hammond and his daughter Clara Lanza, and published in the United States eight years before the Meade-Halifax cornerstone. The medical mystery, as such, represented a major swing — away from the original whodunit toward the pseudo-scientific howdunit, and eventually to the creation of the truly scientific detective whose first great exponent was the immortal Dr. Thorndyke.*

As the decades passed, the medical mystery enjoyed varying levels of popularity. It often faded, but it never died. Then, as recently as 1950 there appeared in book form the scientific crime investigations of hospital pathologist Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee — in Lawrence G. Blochman's DIAGNOSIS: HOMICIDE. *We wondered at the time if the medical mystery was coming back, perhaps to some new height in this age of incredible scientific progress and atomic research.*

The wonder was supported by other occurrences — other straws in the wind. In the field of the serious novel, a book like Morton Thompson's NOT AS A STRANGER, *revealing the intimate details of a doctor's boyhood, schooling, internship, and general practice, became a sensational best-seller. In the field of TV, a dramatic program like "Medic," depicting highly technical aspects of medical procedure, competed successfully with comedians and panel shows.*

So, in last year's contest, we were not at all surprised to receive a contemporary version of the medical mystery — detection in a modern hospital (shades of our own THE DUTCH SHOE MYSTERY!). *Are we on the threshold (or even farther advanced) of a renaissance — a revival of doctor detectives and surgical sleuths? . . . Much worse could happen to current crime writing, for there is one thing the medical mystery can emphasize — realism; and when realism takes the stage — in characterization, background, and motive — the benefits can be not only therapeutic but rejuvenating.*

We hope you will like this authentic glimpse into the usually inaccessi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ble life of a city hospital. The author, Alan E. Nourse, knows whereof he speaks. At the time of this writing, he is a medical student at the University of Pennsylvania who has dabbled in science fiction, delved into science, and dipped his test tube in the crucible of crime.

THE MAN IN THE WHITE MASK

by ALAN E. NOURSE

WHEN HE WALKED DOWN THE corridor to the main hospital elevators the clock on the wall said 8:15. He did not look up. Before starting he had checked the clock. He knew exactly what time it was.

At the elevators he shifted the brown parcel under his arm, waiting impatiently. The arrow indicator pinged *UP*, and the door slid open.

He nodded to the operator. Inside, he turned to face front, gripping the rail behind him until his knuckles whitened. "Five, please," he said.

He glanced at the people in the car. An elderly lady on crutches. Two senior medical students, white-coated and black-bagged, chatting quietly. An older staff man. A nurse.

No one looked at him.

He watched the floor numbers above the door. Then the door slid open and he stepped out into the Operating Room corridor.

Two nurses in blue scrub suits hurried past him as he started down the corridor. At the central-corridor desk someone was talking loudly into the telephone. He walked quickly, his heels clicking on the tile floor. When he reached the black call board over the desk, he paused. *Transthoracic vagotomy, 8:00, Room C. Removal breast mass, 7:45, Room A. Plastic repair of nose, 8:00, Room F . . .*

He pushed through the swinging door into the doctors' dressing room. His palms were cold and damp.

Three surgical residents sprawled at the coffee table, masks slipped down around their necks, scrub caps askew. They nodded to him as he walked across to the linen bins. He pulled out a scrub suit, top and bottom, and a cap, then reached up for a mask.

The mask box was empty.

His heart thudded. He snatched the box up, stared unbelievingly. Empty! He gripped the scrub suit tightly to keep his hand from shaking.

Slowly he walked back to the lockers.

The first one was empty.

So was the second.

In the third, a discarded scrub suit lay on the floor. He snatched it up frantically. A mask fell to his feet. When his heart stopped hammering, he began to undress. His hands shook.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The door banged open again as two blue-clad figures burst in. "— I *knew* that was a funny hernia when I saw it last night, so I said, 'Doctor, are you *sure* you know —' "

The words struck his ears, but he didn't hear them. He glanced at his watch. His fingers fumbled with his street shoes, then he dropped them under the bench. He took the white Operating Room shoes out of the brown paper parcel and put them on. He slipped into the baggy trousers and blue pullover top. The cap had one short string; he cursed as he struggled to knot it. Then he pulled the mask up over his nose.

He walked out into the corridor again. Across the hall, swinging doors led into the scrub room. He stepped inside. It was empty.

He kicked the water pedal, felt the hot needles burn his fingers. He scrubbed for a few seconds. Then he shook the water from his arms, gowned and gloved, and stepped back into the corridor.

The clock said 8:31.

The Operating Room door banged open and a long, wheeled stretcher was rolled across through the door marked *RECOVERY ROOM*. He checked the call board. Then he followed the wheeled stretcher with his eye. The anesthetist and a student nurse had gone across with the patient. After a moment he saw the anesthetist come out and disappear down the corridor. Through the door he glimpsed the patient, flat on her back, glucose infusion bottle swinging from the rack above her head. The student nurse was taking her pulse and writing nervously on a chart board.

Quickly he stepped into the adjacent medication room. He found the syringe in an upper right-hand drawer, fitted a small needle to the nib. Then, clumsy in rubber gloves, he pulled a rubber-topped bottle from his pocket . . .

He walked into the Recovery Room.

The nurse looked up. "Patient's doing fine, Doctor."

He nodded. "Good." He glanced at the glucose bottle, fingered the tubing running into the patient's arm. "Intravenous running all right?"

"Yes, Doctor."

He looked down at the patient. Puffy face, hair knotted into a rumpled turban-like affair, lips faintly bluish and bubbling a little with each breath. There was a sickening stench of ether about her —

Okay, Angel. This isn't going to hurt a bit —

He aspirated the syringe, expelled the air above the fluid. Then he dug the needle into the tubing. He pushed the plunger home. Suddenly he felt warm and relaxed. *Sorry, Angel. But you asked for it.*

A butcher knife plunged into her chest would have been far more satisfying. But this would do. He turned away.

"Doctor —" He froze. The nurse was holding out the chart board. "Will you chart the medication?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His pulse pounded. She held out a pen. He scribbled something, vigorously, thrust the board back into her hand. Then he turned back to the corridor.

He wanted to yell and pull off his mask. He wanted to turn cartwheels and laugh uproariously and then race from the corridor out into the street.

He didn't do anything like that. He walked back into the doctors' dressing room.

Patricia Warren straightened the sheets around her patient's feet, making sure the "ether strap" that held her to the wheeled stretcher was secure about her middle. It was so *exciting* here, everything so skillful and mysterious. She straightened her tiny student's cap primly, with a quick glance down to make sure every starched crease was in place. There were things up here that she couldn't approve, of course — you'd think the surgeons would press their scrub suits, for instance, and get them to fit — and those ratty shoes they wore! Didn't they ever clean them?

Her mind wandered full tilt. It *was* a little grubby, standing around watching a patient recover from anesthesia. Why couldn't ether smell like Old Spice, or something? And the glucose bottles were always running out, and sometimes the patients got sick all over. She shrugged. Some day she would scrub — maybe even be chief instrument nurse! "Scalpel." *Smack*. "Clamp." *Whack*. "Retractor, please." *Slap*. "The sponge count is correct, Doctor." "Thank you, Miss Warren —"

"*Is that woman breathing?*" The intern's voice cut like a razor. She gasped, staring at the patient on the stretcher. The woman's face was splotchy blue. A little wet bubble had formed on her lips. It didn't move.

The glucose bottle had stopped dripping.

The intern shoved her aside, leaned quickly over the woman in alarm. Then: "My God, girl, don't stand there! Get a tank and mask down here —"

Patricia Warren screamed.

What happened next she never knew for sure. A blue-capped head popped through the Recovery Room door, then another. Somebody scurried up with an oxygen mask. "Get Dr. Arnold, quick! And a laryngoscope —" People appeared out of the walls, dozens of people, hundreds. The oxygen tank hissed and the intern clapped the mask down on the blue face, pushing aside the bandages. He began pumping the gas bag furiously. People crowded closer. Then another blue cap pushed through. "Has she got an airway, Ned?"

"She's got an airway, all right —"

Dr. Arnold peered down at her. "What happened?"

"Don't know," replied the intern. "Airway clamped down, I guess. Damned nurse just stood there and howled."

The surgeon gave the intern a queer look. "But the airway's open now?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah. Funny, huh? Where's that nurse? What happened?"

Miss Warren was pushed forward. She wasn't crying. Her throat worked and her eyes were wide. "I — I don't know. One minute she was fine. The doctor gave her the medication, and then —"

The intern blinked. "Medication?"

The nurse thrust out the chart. Ned Thompson stared at the scrawl. He looked up at the surgeon. "Can you read this?"

The surgeon shook his head. "Who wrote it?" Eyes turned to the nurse.

"A doctor," she said. "In a surgery mask. Naturally, I didn't . . ."

The intern lifted the mask from the woman's face, and listened for heart sounds. Then he tossed the mask to the floor. "I think we'd better find out who that doctor was."

"No good?" Dr. Arnold's face was like chalk.

The intern shook his head.

The surgeon took a deep breath. "I guess I'll have to go down and tell her husband."

"But first we'd better call the police," the intern said.

"I knew something was going to happen," Walter Delancey said. "I knew it as sure as I'm sitting here."

Detective-Lieutenant Roger Marsh leafed glumly through the toxicologist's report on the desk before him. It was a small office, furnished in the neat modern style of all of St. Christopher's Hospital. Marsh set the papers down and looked at the thin man in the dark suit. "What makes you so sure your wife was murdered?" he asked.

Walter Delancey took his pipe from his mouth angrily. "Katherine was a strong, healthy woman," he snapped. "Strong, healthy women do not die under ether anesthesia. Not these days."

"But the stress of the operation —"

"Nonsense! So she had her nose straightened. The operation was the simplest imaginable. I'm no doctor, but I know there wasn't any reason for her death." He said again, "She was murdered."

"And you say you knew this was going to happen?"

"I knew *something* was going to happen. It's true I didn't think he'd go this far. But she was a fool. She only saw what she wanted to see."

Lieutenant Marsh leaned back, scratching his morning stubble. "This operation was your wife's idea?"

The man's face seemed whiter now. "That's what she said. But she didn't really want the operation. She wanted to come into the hospital. Nothing more."

"She liked hospitals?"

"She liked doctors."

"Dr. Arnold?"

Delancey nodded. "She wanted to talk to Arnold and he wouldn't see her. She hoped that if she pressed the operation — they'd discussed it long ago — he'd have to see her. Maybe he did last night — I don't know."

"And what were her relations with Dr. Arnold, Mr. Delancey?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The husband's face was very pale now. "She thought he was going to marry her. She was filing for a divorce."

Lieutenant Marsh leaned back. His spine ached. "How long had she been . . . seeing Dr. Arnold?" he asked.

"Months — years — I don't know." Delancey banged his pipe out against his heel. "I only gradually realized —"

"Who else was she seeing?"

Delancey half rose. "What do you mean by that?"

"If someone killed your wife, Mr. Delancey, I need to know who might have had reason — all of them."

The thin man sank back. "She was a beautiful woman," he said wearily. "She had a lot of admirers. I don't know who they were. But when she asked me for a divorce, I went to have it out with Arnold." He spread his hands. "He denied that they planned to be married. Indiscretions were one thing. A surgeon's wife — a fashionable surgeon's wife — that was something else again. He refused to see her after that."

"And your wife?"

"She was furious. She tried to see him. He was out. She saw Talbot, his junior assistant, and finally arranged for the operation. She was positive Dr. Arnold would change his mind if he saw her again." Delancey drew a deep breath. "I begged her not to come here. I told her that Arnold wasn't the kind of man to chase. She laughed in my face. She went to the hospital the next week. I'd like to know how he killed her."

Marsh shoved the papers into a folder with a sigh. "The report says sodium cyanide," he said.

"It's mortifying," said Dr. Rupert Arnold hoarsely. "To me and to the hospital. It's frightening, too." He glanced across to Marsh, then to the intern, and on to the red-haired man in the scrub suit. "I can't believe that one of my own staff — men I've worked with and trusted — could have done this thing."

"The woman is dead," said Lieutenant Marsh. "Can you believe that, Dr. Arnold?"

The surgeon's eyes fell. "I have no choice."

"All right, I want the whole story. Who spotted the trouble first? You?" He pointed a stubby finger at Dr. Ned Thompson.

The intern nodded. "I'd just had some coffee after Dr. Arnold's 7:45 gall bladder case. I stopped in Recovery Room to see if Mrs. Delancey was there yet." He shrugged. "She was there, all right. I saw she wasn't breathing, and raised a howl."

"Who operated on her?"

The red-haired junior surgeon looked up. "I did."

Marsh nodded. "And what time did you send her to the Recovery Room, Dr. Talbot? I mean, after the operation?"

"At 8:30. Maybe a minute or two later."

"Operation went all right?"

"Perfectly. Best nasal plastic I've ever done."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why did *you* operate on Mrs. Delancey? I thought she was Dr. Arnold's patient."

Talbot shot Arnold an unhappy look. "Rupert asked me to handle it."

"All right, we'll go into that later. Did the operation start on schedule?"

"It was scheduled for 8:00 It started a couple of minutes late."

"How long did you expect it to take?"

The junior surgeon frowned. "There was no way of telling. If everything went smoothly, I expected about a twenty-minute job. But I've had them go on for an hour and more."

Marsh nodded. "So there was no way anyone could know *exactly* what time she would be in the Recovery Room. Now, Dr. Talbot, did you follow the patient out of the operating room?"

"No. The anesthetist took her over. I had another operation scheduled for 8:30. I went into the scrub room to regown and stopped for a moment to talk to a student about a nose operation." He ran a hand through his thick red hair. "Then I heard the hubbub down the hall."

Marsh turned to the intern. "What time was it when you first noticed the trouble, Dr. Thompson?"

"About 8:35. Give or take a minute or two."

"So the patient was in the Recovery Room with the nurse for no more than five minutes. Which means that whoever brought in the syringe came almost immediately." Marsh scowled. "Ask the nurse to come in."

Miss Warren took a seat near the door. Her feet were drawn tight under the chair.

"Miss Warren — it's Patricia, isn't it? Well, we're trying to clear up some things about the accident this morning, Patricia." Marsh gave her a sympathetic smile. The girl nodded. "This doctor who came in with the syringe — did you notice the time?"

"It was just after 8:30. The patient had only been in the room a minute."

"What did the man look like, Patricia?"

She opened her mouth, then hesitated. "I don't know. He must have come from the scrub room — he still had his cap and mask on, and his gown wasn't tied."

"You didn't recognize him?"

"No — no. All I could see was his eyes. He was medium-tall, and — well, I couldn't *tell*."

"Was he wearing rubber gloves?"

"Yes."

"Now think, Patricia. Surely you recognized *some* feature or other about this man? He wasn't a phantom —"

"Lieutenant." The intern leaned forward. "The girl doesn't know anybody on the surgical floor. This was her first morning on surgery — the student nurses all over the hospital shifted services last night. The only doctors she knows by sight are the medical men down on Ward F —"

Marsh stared at the girl. "Is this true?"

She nodded miserably, fighting back tears. "They all look the same to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me. And what was I supposed to do? He walked in with the medication and stuck the needle in the tube — was I supposed to ask him, a doctor, what he was doing? Then I gave him the chart, and he charted it. And all the doctors around here write so you can't read it anyway —," she was losing the fight.

"All right, Patricia. I'm not saying you did anything wrong. But the woman *was* murdered under your nose, and you *did* see the man who did it." The detective looked suddenly at Dr. Arnold. "And where were you during those five minutes?"

Dr. Arnold's voice was harsh. "I had a gall bladder case at 7:45. I finished at 8:25, with Dr. Thompson's assistance. Then I went into the dictating booth at the end of the hall to dictate an operative note for the patient's chart."

"How long did that take?"

"About a minute. Then I walked back, checked the call board, and changed gown and gloves."

"Your gown was untied?"

"Of course. The nurse always unties us when we finish an operation."

Marsh suddenly turned back to the nurse. "You didn't notice anything about the man who came into Recovery Room?"

"Nothing."

"*Could it have been one of the men in this room?*"

She studied the doctors slowly, one by one.

"It's very important," Marsh added carefully.

She said in a rush, "It could have been any one of them." Then her eyes flickered to Dr. Arnold's gaunt face. "But it looked like his eyes I saw."

Marsh stood up. "That's all for the time being. I want minute by minute accountings of all your movements from each of you, and from everyone in the hospital who came near the operating suite this morning. There'll be a detective around to see you about that. And Dr. Arnold — a minute, please."

When the others had left, Marsh nodded the surgeon to a chair. "I'd like to know the story from your side, Doctor. Delancey told me his."

The surgeon's forehead was wet. "Lieutenant, you can't believe what Walter Delancey says. He nearly attacked me this morning in the waiting room when I broke the news to him. He was so crazy-jealous he'd say anything to incriminate me —"

"Why didn't *you* operate on Mrs. Delancey, Dr. Arnold?"

"Because I didn't want to see her again, that's why. I'd told her that, but she wouldn't be discouraged. So I asked Talbot to handle her."

"She didn't need the nose operation?"

"It's a common enough cosmetic procedure. But she didn't really *need* it."

"So you turned today's operation over to Dr. Talbot — and yet you saw her last night in the hospital anyway."

A look of defeat crossed Dr. Ar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nold's face. "The nurses, I suppose! Yes, I saw her. I *had* to. She was just beyond reason."

"About the marriage, you mean."

"Marriage?" The surgeon seemed genuinely startled. "No, about the money."

"Money?" It was Marsh's turn to be startled.

"She must have been out of her mind. I haven't that kind of money. Surgeons do all right, but they aren't millionaires."

Marsh sat back slowly. "Just how much money was she trying to get out of you, Doctor?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

After a moment Marsh said, "Why?"

The doctor's voice was bitter. "About a year ago we met at a cocktail party — Walter's advertising agency was giving it. We . . . began seeing each other. Frequently, at first. She hated Walter, wanted a divorce from him. I offered to help. It was foolish, but I didn't know what I was dealing with at first. Until I began to hear the talk." He paused. "It was vicious stuff that can cut the heart out of a surgical practice. Not open gossip, just snickers and nasty hints. When I realized what was happening, I tried to stop it. That was just what she was waiting for. She could turn it on or off, she said, just as she wished. That was when she asked for the money."

"Then the question of marriage never arose?"

"Never. She may have told Walter that — she knew how he felt about her. It used to amuse her."

"And what did you do when she asked for the money?"

"I refused. So she turned the stories on again, just enough so it began to hurt. Last night she told me that was merely a starter. Unless I paid off." He made a fist on the chair arm. "She didn't have anything on me. Not really. But she didn't need anything. Not with my profession."

Marsh stared out of the window at the hospital buildings below. "This was a clever murder, Doctor," he said slowly, "and a risky murder. The nurse saw the killer, and he knew she would see him. He also knew that on her first day in surgery, every surgeon would look like every other surgeon. He knew operating-room procedure. He had access to one of the most inaccessible spots imaginable to do his murder in. He had to be prepared to wait up to half an hour for his opportunity — just standing around, if necessary, under a dozen pairs of eyes — and he had to know he wouldn't be challenged." Marsh spread his hands apologetically. "I'm sorry, Doctor Arnold. It narrows the field, you see. There are only a few people here who fill the bill. And only one had a motive."

Dr. Arnold's face was gray. "Lieutenant, I tell you —"

"I think you'd better tell me downtown, Doctor."

Late in the afternoon Dr. Ned Thompson came up from Receiving

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ward to find Pat Warren working alone in the supply room.

The police had been all over the operating suite during the afternoon, inspecting the operating rooms and the adjacent scrub rooms; quizzing the surgical residents who had been in the corridors, operating rooms, or doctors' dressing room during the early morning hours; quizzing medical students and nurses — even questioning the two patients who had been lying on wheeled stretchers in the corridor at the time of the murder.

And it had been a fruitless search. Yes, the residents had seen a surgeon in the dressing room early in the morning — about a dozen surgeons, to be accurate, and another dozen in the scrub rooms. No, they didn't particularly notice who — oh, yes, Dr. Carollo from Children's was up for that heart case. Anyone else? Well, they couldn't exactly remember —

The nurses had been even less help. Every student on the floor was new that morning; none of them knew the surgeons in scrub suits, caps, masks, and gowns. The graduates had been busy in the operating rooms. Schedules of movements were compiled and turned in, Dr. Ned Thompson's among the first. They added up to precisely nothing.

But now most of the police had gone. The operating rooms were empty except for the emergency fracture in Room D, and the neurosurgical case in the Surgical Amphitheater (which might go on all night). Ned Thompson walked down the empty corridor and stopped at the supply room door.

Pat Warren looked up. "Have they all gone?"

"I think so."

She leaned back against the table with a sigh. "I feel so awful. If I'd only *known* —"

"Stop torturing yourself."

"What are they going to do to Dr. Arnold?"

The intern scowled. "Marsh took him downtown. It doesn't look good."

The girl turned away. "I hated to say it. I mean, that it could have been him. But it *could* have been."

"Well, you've heard the stories going around. She must have been one prize package." Thompson hesitated. "Look, Pat, you must have noticed *something* —"

The girl's eyes blazed. "Now don't you start in on me! I'm sick of being picked at —"

"But you noticed his eyes, saw that he was of medium height. You must have seen more."

"I tell you I can't remember. I just didn't notice."

"Was he nervous? Did his hands shake? Did he look different in any way?"

"I — I was thinking about other things. He just looked . . . ordinary. Oh, maybe a little neater than some of the others —"

"Then you did notice! That's the sort of thing I mean. *How* was he neater?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The girl thought for a moment. "That's funny. I just got that impression, somehow. I remember thinking how sloppy the surgeons looked, after I was expecting everything to be so crisp and shiny and all. But their gowns were all faded and their caps were wrinkled —"

"Wasn't his gown faded?"

"Yes . . . Oh, I don't know!" She turned back to the instrument trays.

He turned away, disheartened. But what could he expect? He had been surprised, too, on his own first day. The surgeons had been so sloppy-looking, with their stained shoes and their misfitting scrub suits —

Dr. Ned Thompson checked his watch, and walked into the doctors' dressing room to change back to his street clothes. It was getting dark; he switched on the lights. Sitting down on the bench, he slipped off his O.R. shoes and tossed them onto the heap of white shoes under the bench. Silly to have to wear white shoes, anyway. They were no less dirty than street oxfords, and nobody ever cleaned them.

His eye stopped on the pile of shoes. Then he reached down and pulled a pair of white bucks out from the bottom of the pile.

They were common-looking bucks with red rubber soles. He ran his finger gently over the toe. White and clean. He set them carefully down on the bench, then placed his own brown-encrusted bucks on the bench beside them. He hadn't cleaned his since his first week on surgery. And they looked every day of it — blood-spattered, stained, sloppy —

And suddenly he knew the truth was in reach.

Ten minutes later he was up on the private surgery floor, just in time to meet the night floor nurse coming on duty. "Visitors? Well, there was you —"

"Yes, yes, I know," Thompson growled. "I took a history and physical at dinner time. I mean who else?"

The nurse considered for a moment. "Well — her husband came about nine, I think. Nice guy. Brought a box of candy for the floor nurses. But oh, my, what a fight."

She frowned.

"Fight?"

The nurse gave him large eyes. "He didn't want her to have that operation. Kept saying, 'I tell you, you can't go through with it! You can't do it, Katherine —.' And then things got so loud we had to shush them up. He was saying something about if she went through with it, that was the end."

"And how did she take this?"

"What she said wasn't fit for mixed company. Poor guy. Imagine living with a woman like that —"

Dr. Thompson snatched the telephone. "Dr. Talbot? Do you have a few minutes?" His voice was shaky. "I want to ask you a question or two. I want to know exactly what that woman was doing in this hospital last night."

The talk with Dr. Talbot lasted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more than a few minutes. When Thompson left the red-haired surgeon's office on the fourth floor it was almost nine o'clock. He took the elevator up to the darkened operating-room corridor. Checking his watch, he walked down to the doctors' dressing room and slowly changed back into his scrub suit. Then he went across to the scrub room and scrubbed laboriously, his forehead wrinkled in concentration. When he finally pulled the gloves onto his hands, snapping them around the ends of the gown, he glanced at his watch again.

He had done it many, many times before. Every step was second nature to him, every step totally familiar —

Suddenly he ripped the gloves off, tore the gown from his shoulders, and raced down to the telephone desk. A moment later he had Detective-Lieutenant Marsh on the line.

"Can you meet me downtown in half an hour?"

"What is it? What's happened?"

Ned Thompson said excitedly. "I can tell you who did it, and how it was done!"

He met Lieutenant Marsh and Walter Delancey at the police station at a quarter past seven the next morning. Marsh looked red-eyed and weary as he greeted the intern; Delancey simply looked puzzled.

Marsh asked the intern, "You're sure Talbot is operating at County Hospital this morning?"

Dr. Thompson nodded. "He does most of his work with us at St. Christopher's, but he operates at County two mornings a week. Did you take care of your end?"

Marsh took a sheet of paper from his pocket. "Everything's straight," he said, "and here's the floor plan you asked for." He looked at the intern suspiciously. "You wouldn't be pulling a fast one, would you? You say you've never been in County Hospital?"

"Never been near it." Thompson spread out the floor plan. "All right, let's study it carefully." He traced with his finger. "Here we are. Operating Rooms are on the third floor, in this rear wing. Okay. Elevators here . . . this corridor probably would be best . . . Look at it closely, gentlemen. Memorize it."

"I think you're screwy," Marsh said. "Twenty dollars says we'll be nabbed before we get in the door."

"Is your car outside?" asked Dr. Thompson.

"Yes."

"You're on. We're going to take a little ride."

At the intern's suggestion they parked two blocks from the County Hospital and walked to the entrance. "County is a little smaller than St. Christopher's," he remarked, "which should make it a little more difficult. But there's only one important thing to keep in mind — watch your faces. You've both seen the floor plan, and you now know it just as well as I do. Walk as though you know where you're going. That's all."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The clock on the wall said a quarter to eight. They crossed the lobby to the corridor that went off into the East wing. Then they followed it, walking briskly. Dr. Thompson stopped in front of a bank of elevators and pushed the Up button.

Presently an elevator came. The three men stepped inside, and the intern touched the button that closed the doors. They whined up to the third floor and stepped out into a busy corridor.

Wheeled stretchers lined the walls. Three doctors walked by in scrub suits and masks; a nurse scurried past them in the direction they were going.

Nobody stopped them.

They walked down to the nurses' desk. Thompson pointed to the list hanging on the wall. "O.R. schedule," he muttered. "Ours is a big black call board. Here they use a typewritten list. But every O.R. has one."

The Lieutenant stared at the list. Then he said: "Talbot is in Room Seven."

The intern led them back up the corridor to the door marked *DOCTORS ONLY*. He pushed it open. The room was small, lined with lockers. A pile of white clothing lay on a table. Dr. Thompson smiled. "Shall we dress, gentlemen?"

They helped themselves to scrub suits and slipped out of their street clothes. The puzzled frown on Walter Delancey's face deepened. "Would somebody please tell me what we're doing?"

Thompson held up a warning hand. The door swung open and two doctors with loud voices walked in. They paid no attention to the three strangers. They didn't even look at them.

Marsh's face was interested now. He struggled into the pajama-like suit and adjusted a surgical cap on his head. The three men raised their masks. Then Thompson led them across the hall into the scrub room.

Still nobody stopped them.

A nurse came into the scrub room. Dr. Thompson pushed his arms into a gown; the others watched him and followed suit. The nurse tied the strings behind them as they slipped on rubber gloves. Then Thompson nodded, and they pushed through the swinging door into Operating Room Seven.

The operation was in progress. Three men were working around the table, in the bright lights, with an instrument nurse beside them; a second nurse was moving about the room. Thompson led them up the steps into the gallery, picked a vantage spot just to the right of Dr. Talbot. They began to watch.

Lieutenant Marsh's breath slipped through his teeth. He stared at the intern.

At that moment Patricia Warren walked into the operating room.

He lost control only for a moment. An involuntary start, the muscles in an arm tightening. Dr. Thompson saw it and his own muscles tightened.

The student nurse from St. Christopher's was staring at the three of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them. Slowly she walked toward them. Then her eyes focused on a gloved hand, and her own hand went up to her mouth. There was a wedding band under the translucent rubber.

She pointed her finger at him. "I remember," she said. "I remember the ring . . ."

It was the shoes, of course," the intern said, when it was all over. "The shoes were what bothered her the most. She was looking for shine and polish, her first day in surgery — and when she saw a crowd of people wearing dirty, stained white shoes. So when a man came into the room wearing a pair of clean white bucks, he couldn't help but look neater than the rest. And then I found those shoes in the dressing room. In all my time on surgery I've never seen a surgeon wearing a pair of clean white shoes."

He grinned at Marsh and lit a cigarette. "You were the one that started things rolling," he said. "You said the operating room was 'inaccessible'. And you'd expect that it would be. I thought so, too, even when I was a medical student. Scared the life out of me to walk through the O.R. corridor for fear somebody would jump down my throat for being there. *But nobody ever did.* Why should they? Everybody in the O.R. is busy and preoccupied. Everybody has his own troubles. Everybody assumes, as a matter of course, that nobody drifts into the doctors' dressing room unless he has a legitimate reason to be there.

"But if you strip away the mumbo-jumbo and get down to cases, the operating room of any hospital in the country is no more inaccessible to the man on the street than the corner bar — *as long as he acts as if he belongs there!* All he has to do is find out where to go, how to get there, and what to do when he arrives. Any third-year medical student could tell him in fifteen minutes and he could walk into an operating room unchallenged. And that's exactly what Walter Delancey did."

Dr. Thompson put out his smoke. "Point number two: Walter Delancey knew his wife well enough to know what made her tick. She'd lived with that nose for thirty years without worrying about it — until he happened to drop a few choice remarks about how crooked it really was. She didn't come to St. Christopher's to see Dr. Arnold. She was in the driver's seat with him — a telephone call and a threat would have brought him running, day or night. As Dr. Talbot made perfectly clear to me, Katherine Delancey came to St. Christopher's Hospital for one reason — to get her nose fixed. That's the only reason she was in this hospital — that's why she let her husband make all the arrangements, including the day she was to have the operation. You'll find it all on the admission record, if you want to look."

He grinned at Pat Warren, as he reached for his hat and coat. "The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rest was a cinch. He worked the date to fit the change in nursing services. He didn't care what nurse was there, as long as it was a new nurse."

Lieutenant Marsh shook his head. "There still wasn't any proof."

"No, but there was motive, and now I knew there was opportunity, too. I counted on Delancey doing things during our visit to County just the way he had done them the morning of the murder, and he did. Only by his second time around, Pat Warren had a little more experience with surgeons and what they wear. She had learned what Delancey had no way of knowing — that you don't scrub for surgery with a wedding ring on. She'd seen it the day before and it hadn't registered — until she saw it again. And then she knew she was looking at the right man."

The intern started out the door with the girl. Then he looked back at Marsh with a grin. "If you happen to have a free morning some day, Lieutenant, come on up to the O.R. We'll let you hold a retractor."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Five prize-winning stories — including those by:

Shirley Barker
Veronica Parker Johns

plus six other fine tales of crime and detection — including those by:

Agatha Christie
Rex Stout
Arthur Gordon
Michael Innes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD *by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER* (MORROW, $2.75)	". . . you'll have to keep your mind as sharp and devious as Mason's own to follow this one . . ." (AB)	"The writing is no better than usual, but the story's lively . . ." (FC)
THEY ALL BLEED RED *by RICHARD STED* (SIMON & SCHUSTER, $2.50)	"Events move fast . . . transparency of the chief problem." (LGO)	"Unusually convincing job . . . swift and suspenseful whirl . . ." (DD)
THE BENEVENT TREASURE *by PATRICIA WENTWORTH* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	". . . it's a romantic melodrama, and a highly attractive one . . ." (AB)	". . . rich, ripe and lurid . . . and thoroughly enjoyable." (AdV)
TEACH YOU A LESSON *by JIM HOLLIS* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . largely excellent . . . stagily contrived finale . . ." (AB)	". . . unreal, unpleasant . . . and, in my opinion, in bad taste. Thumbs down." (AdV)
WHISTLE PAST THE GRAVEYARD *by RICHARD DEMING* (RINEHART, $2.75)	". . . novelty and ingenuity . . . excitement and action . . . an individual sort of affability . . ." (AB)	". . . good bet . . . one for tough customers." (CC)
SUICIDE EXCEPTED *by CYRIL HARE* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	". . . rewarding discovery." (LGO)	". . . neat twist . . . ingenious, fast-paced tale. Brainy and brisk." (SC)
ANOTHER MORGUE HEARD FROM *by FREDERICK C. DAVIS* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"Easy as ever, in Davis' style, but a bit flat and somber. B minus." (LGO)	"Smoothly diverting." (DD)

AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times*
FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press*
CC: *Curtis Casewit in the Denver Post*
SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review*
DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key at bottom gives sources.

THE DEAR OLD GENTLEMEN *by GEORGE GOODCHILD* and *BECHHOFER ROBERTS* (MACMILLAN, $2.75)	". . . a work of unusual quality . . . Scottish scene is admirably done . . ." (H-M)	"An absorbing puzzle." (FP)
THE DAMNED LOVELY *by JACK WEBB* (RINEHART, $2.75)	". . . as confusing as it is fast and readable." (AB)	". . . has something fresh to offer . . . well worth your attention." (DBH)
A KEY TO DEATH *by FRANCES* and *RICHARD LOCKRIDGE* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	"Beautifully written as always by the Lockridges." (DBH)	". . . a workmanlike ending. But not a major Lockridge. Pleasant." (AdV)
VAMP TILL READY *by TERRY RIEMAN* (HARPER, $2.75)	". . . considerable talent . . . an excellent choice." (FC)	"Jarred musical set well drawn; many bouffant skirts. Attractive number." (SC)
THE BLACK ITALIAN *by SELWYN JEPSON* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	"The story is never believable for a page, nor dull for a sentence." (AB)	"Genoa goings-on fast, diverting; love interest slight impediment. Good fun." (SC)
THE HEARSE HORSE SNICKERED *by CAROLYN THOMAS* (LIPPINCOTT, $2.50)	"Fairly well plotted and most amusingly told." (LGO)	"The characters, dialogue, plot and setting are all A-1." (FC)
THE DEVIL THREW DICE *by AMBER DEAN* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . convincing enough if rather jerkily presented. B minus." (LGO)	"Rural portraits are nice additions and the whole is easy reading." (DBH)

H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair*
DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune*
LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle*
FP: *Fay Profilet in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

$500 *can be yours if you submit*

the best new title for the current Jonathan Press Mystery

LAYOUT FOR A CORPSE

by GENE GOLDSMITH

(Now at your newsstand)

Mercury Publications is offering $500 for the most original and suitable title for this exciting tale of murder in glittering, cosmopolitan San Francisco. All you have to do to enter is read the book and submit your title in accordance with the simple contest instructions on page one of "LAYOUT FOR A CORPSE," by Gene Goldsmith. This contest is open to everyone except employees of Mercury Publications and their families. The judges will be the editors of Jonathan Press Mysteries and their decision will be final.

LAYOUT FOR A CORPSE is a book you will enjoy for its unusual, sophisticated background, its fast action, and its unique puzzle-plot. Pick up a copy at your newsstand now to assure your chance to enter the contest. Don't miss this story of a beauty contest, the girls who would do anything to win it, the twisted motives that drove the advertising men behind it, and the brutal killer who turned the contest slogan—"See San Francisco—and LIVE!"—into a password of death . . .

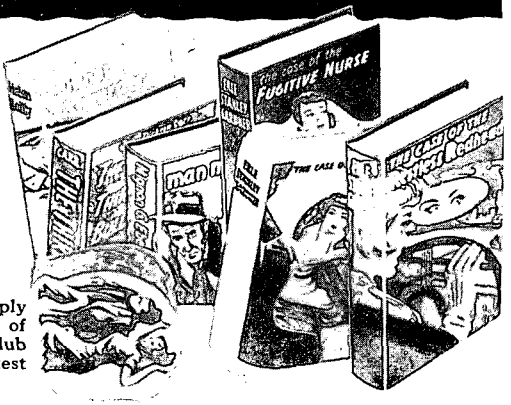
MERCURY PUBLICATIONS *471 Park Avenue New York 22 N. Y.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes! YOU GET $15.00 WORTH OF NEW MYSTERIES AT ONCE—FREE!

—Continued from Back Cover

Including 3 of the Latest Hits by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER



WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for mystery fans! You get SIX big mystery hits, including three sizzlers by Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full size, full length* book, absolutely complete. A $15.00 value — but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in the famous Detective Book Club — the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the Best NEW Mysteries

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop"— by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (a $6.00 to $7.50 value) for only $1.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview", which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean—delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail coupon promptly, and we will send you at once—FREE—the six complete mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

45

Walter J. Black, President ST
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length mystery novels pictured on other side. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $1.89 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. *(Books shipped in U. S. A. only.)*

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City..... Zone No. (if any)..... State.....

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Including 3 of the Latest Perry Mason Mysteries by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

All Full-Length, Full-Size Books—A $15 Value

① THE CASE OF THE RESTLESS REDHEAD

First, Mason's gorgeous red-headed client is accused of stealing $40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of *MURDER!* Perry must save her from the chair—though he suspects she may be GUILTY!

② THE CASE OF THE RUNAWAY CORPSE

Myrna Davenport hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband Ed. (He has just died of *poisoning!*) All Perry finds is *—blank* paper! The police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

③ THE CASE OF THE FUGITIVE NURSE

Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an *empty safe.* Then a blonde *slams the safe shut.* Not sinister . . . *except* that the *tenant* had been MURDERED!

④ MAN MISSING

By Mignon G. Eberhart

Sarah Kent noticed odd things at the hospital: A smell of ether in the *wrong place.* A door closing by itself. And then the still figure on the bed. The chief suspect, *A MAN DEAD FOR 3 YEARS!*

⑤ THE THIRD BULLET

By John Dickson Carr

Vicky Adams disappeared from a cottage *even though all the doors and windows were still locked from the inside!* She isn't found—ALIVE!

⑥ TELL HER IT'S MURDER

By Helen Reilly

Your name is Jim Andrus. You attend a party, have too much to drink. You "black out." Next morning you're accused of MURDER!

SEE OTHER SIDE

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ROSLYN, L. I.

NEW YORK

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED